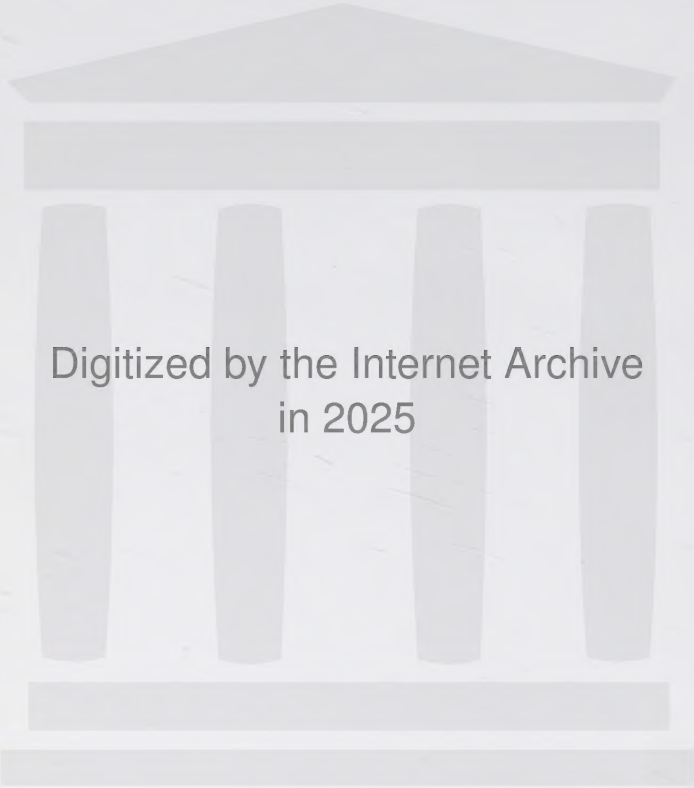


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THE DIVAN

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THE DIVAN

(LE SOFA)

A MORALITY STORY

BY

CLAUDE PROSPER JOLYOT DE CREBILLON

(CREBILLON FILS)

Complete English Version by Martin Kamin

ILLUSTRATED BY C. RAYMOND

NEW YORK

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PREFACE

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PREFACE

A few centuries have elapsed since a prince named Schah-Baham reigned over India. He was a grandson of the magnanimous Schah-Riar, of whose great deeds one reads in the *Thousand and One Nights*; who, among other activities, took such keen delight in the strangulation of women and in listening to varied tales. He it was who spared the life of the incomparable Scheherezade, for the sole reason that she could narrate such wondrous stories.

Whether Schah-Baham was not overly delicate on the score of his own honour; whether his wives did not sleep with their negro slaves, or, which is also quite probable, he was kept in ignorance of it, at all events, he was a good and convenient husband. He had inherited nothing from his distinguished and notorious grandfather, other than his virtues and his taste for agreeable legends. One is even assured that the collection of Scheherezade's tales, which his august grandfather ordered to be inscribed in golden letters, was the only book he ever deigned to read.

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However these tales might charm the spirit; however agreeable and sublime the impression one culls from them might be, it is dangerous to indulge solely in literature of this character. Only enlightened people, above all prejudice, who are aware of the futility of science, know how useful this kind of letters is for society, and how much estimation and even veneration we owe to those who have enough genius to create this work, enough power to devote themselves to it, in spite of the tinge of frivolity that pride and ignorance have attached to this type of writing. The important lessons that these fables contain, the noble flights of imagination one finds in them so frequently, the facetious whimsicalities they abound in, do not leave any impression upon the vulgar, from whom one cannot expect that measure of esteem which one gives to those things which they cannot comprehend.

Schah-Baham is a memorable example of injustice done to people of this kind. Though he knew the origin of the jinn as well as it was known at that period, though he knew more about the celebrated realm of Ginnistan and the famous dynasties of the first Persian kings, and was undeniably the only man of his century who knew best the history of all events that never occurred, yet he was considered the most ignorant prince in the world.

It is true that he related tales with little grace (all the more annoying on account of his constant repe-

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tition), so that it was impossible for him not to prove a bit tiresome to his audience, which consisted mainly of women and courtiers, who are ordinarily as delicate as they are superficial and who are more impressed by elegance of expression than by the greatness and the truth of an idea. Without doubt it was from the prevailing opinions in his own court that a judgment was formed of Schah-Baham, and that Scheik-Ebn-Taher-Abou-Feraibe, the contemporary historian of the prince, gathered his material for his great history of India, in which the following description of Schah-Baham occurs:

Schah-Baham, the founder of that name, was an ignorant prince of the most indolent kind. He possessed very little intelligence, but credited himself with a great deal, a quality which is prevalent among persons of his type. He was always struck with astonishment at everything that was usual, and could never understand anything but absurdities and situations beyond probability. Though for a whole year he never permitted himself to think, a moment rarely passed when he was silent. Nevertheless, he very modestly asserted that although he did not pretend to have a vivacious mind, yet in power of contemplation he had no equal.

The Sultan was indifferent to all mental exertion—every effort of this nature displeased him. Nevertheless, he was not inactive. He had birds which monop-

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olized a great deal of his attention. Some parrots, which thanks to the care he exercised in their education, were the most stupid parrots in India, not to mention his monkeys, to whom he devoted a part of his time, and after he exhausted these amusements, he considered his wives the most worthy of diverting him.

In spite of those multitudinous occupations and pleasures, he could hardly avoid boredom. Even these delightful tales, which to him were subjects of perpetual interest and admiration, and which he prohibited from being criticized under penalty of death, grew insipid to him with constant repetition. He admired them, but he yawned while admiring. This weariness followed him finally to the very apartments of his wives, where he spent a part of his life watching them embroidering and carving. For these arts he had a singular esteem. The art of carving he regarded as the highest achievement of the human mind and to which he wanted to see all his courtiers apply themselves diligently.

He rewarded all those who excelled in this ingenious art too highly to have anyone in his empire neglect it. Thus embroidery and carving were the only occupations in India in which one could still attain honours. The Sultan did not recognize any other kind of merit, or at least, he did not doubt that a man who possessed this talent was endowed with a fine

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enough mind to make a good general or an excellent minister. In order to prove to what extent he was convinced of this, he raised to the post of Grand Vizir, an unoccupied courtier, who not knowing what to do with his time, spent it in annoying his ruler. This courtier, who had for a long time been obscured in the mass, turned out to be, fortunately for him, one of the best carvers in the kingdom just at the time when it pleased Schah-Baham to honour this art. Not being obliged as many others to seek favoritism through intrigues, it was only to the superiority of this talent that he owed the brilliant opportunity to perform his skill before his master, and thus attain the first office of the Empire.

Among all the wives of the Sultan the most eminent was the Queen-Sultana, who, due to her fine mind, gained recognition among those in this frivolous court, who still had the courage to think and to study. She was one of those in the court, who recognized merit and who encouraged it; and even the Sultan himself rarely dared to disagree with her, even though she disapproved of his taste and his recreations, and when she harassed him about his monkeys and his other interests, he contented himself with telling her that she was caustic, an imperfection that the stupid never fail to find in the wise.

One day Schah-Baham, surrounded by his entire court, in the harem, where he watched the carvers

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with incredible attention and unable to overcome the weariness that was overwhelming him, said, yawning: "I am not astonished that I am falling asleep. We don't speak a word. I would like to hear some conversation."

"What do you want us to discuss?" asked the Sultana.

"How do I know?" he asked irritably. "Am I to divine it? Is it not sufficient that I want you to discuss something, without being obliged to tell you what I want you to talk about? Do you know that you have far less sense than you think you have? That you dream more than you talk? And that with the exception of a few *bon-mots*, three-fourths of which I do not even listen to, I regard you as incredibly stupid? Do you not think, for example, that if the Sultana Scheherezade were alive and here, that she would not tell you the most beautiful tales without being requested by my Aunt Dinarzade? And speaking of her, an idea occurs to me, . . . regardless of her excellent memory, it was impossible for her to retain all the tales she had learned; it seems inconceivable to me that no one knows precisely the legends she had forgotten; and that since her nobody has told such stories; and that nobody is actually telling them nowadays."

"That is no doubt true, Sire," said the Vizir, "but I can assure you that not only do I know them, but

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that I possess the talent to tell them in such a bizarre manner that not even your late grandmother could surpass."

"Vizir, Vizir," reproved the Sultan, "you have made a great boast. My grandmother was a person of rare accomplishments."

"In truth," exclaimed the Sultana, "it does require a great deal of talent to be able to tell a story. One would say, on hearing you, that a story is the masterpiece of human endeavor. And yet . . . what can be more absurd than that? What kind of a work is it, (if it is true that a tale can bear this name), in which the probabilities are always violated; and in which accepted ideas are constantly inverted; which, being based upon a false and frivolous premise, employs only the extraordinary and the immortal power of the fairy; which only disrupts the order of nature and the elements for the purpose of creating ridiculous and strangely imagined happenings, but which have nothing to redeem the extravagance of their creation. It is fortunate enough that those unbearable fables spoil only the mind, and that their lurid images, that injure the modesty, do not pierce the heart with dangerous impressions."

"Idle tales of a chatter-box!" said the Sultan with gravity, "big words that mean nothing! All you have just said seemed at first very beautiful,—it impressed, I must admit, but in the light of reflection it is

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impossible that . . . The question here is whether you are right, and I want to tell you and to prove to you that I do not believe you are. Since the purpose of a tale is surely not to create wit, and merely because it entertains me, it is clear that a story need not be a frivolous thing. Of course, it is not me whom you can convince that a Sultan may be a fool. Besides, parenthetically speaking, it is obvious that a marvellous thing, by that I mean one of those things . . . I would say . . . If that were the question . . . but let us speak sincerely. What does it concern us after all? I claim that I am fond of these tales, and in addition I find them pleasant, especially when they are of the sort that are known among sensible fellows as a bit facetious. That is what makes them so extremely lively. And here I am ready to listen, for you told me you know stories and that you can tell them. That is really what I want. I thought that in order to shorten the days, everybody here shall be obliged to relate a legend. When I say a legend, I know what I mean. I want extraordinary events of jinns, of talismans; and do not be mistaken there, for only in fiction can one find truth. Well, so we all agree to tell stories? May Mahomet help us! But I do not doubt that even without his help, I could do as well myself, and the reason for that is, that I come from an ancestry where one does not ignore the art of narrating and I may say, without vanity, very excellently.

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“Besides, since I am not at all partial, I declare that each will speak in his turn, that lots, and not my will, shall determine the sequence of your turn. I understand that each one has the liberty to tell me a story and that each day for half an hour, more or less, according to my inclinations, will be devoted to story telling.”

When he finished these words, he made the entire court draw lots. In spite of the wish of the Vizir, the first one was drawn by a young courtier, who after obtaining the Sultan's permission, commenced in the following manner.

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Chapter I

THE LEAST ANNOYING BOOK

“SIRE, Your Majesty is aware that although I am his subject, I am not of his faith and that I worship Brahma as God.”

“And even so, what does it have to do with your story? Besides, that is your affair. So much the worse for you that you bow to Brahma. It would be worth a hundred-fold were you a Mahomedan.”

“We devotees of Brahma believe in the law of Karma,” continued Amanzai (that was the name of the story teller). “We believe that the soul on leaving a being passes from body to body until Brahma finds it sufficiently purified to allow it to rest in Nirvana. Although the belief in metempsychosis is generally established among us, we do not all have the same reason to believe it, for there are few to whom it is given to remember the different transmigrations of their souls. It usually happens that the released soul does not profit by its experiences as it passes from prison to prison. And so we recommence each life anew, as susceptible to wrong as when, at the beginning,

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Brahma took the soul out of the immense whirl of flame where it was awaiting its destination.

"Many of us complain against this disposition of Brahma, but I doubt whether they are right. Our souls, destined through centuries to pass from body to body, would be very unhappy to retain the memories of what they had been. A soul that once animated the body of a human-being, would not be able to sustain without despair the new conditions in the body of a reptile, or in any other obscure creature. However, a soul that finds itself in the heart of riches or is raised to a high rank from a lowly one, would abuse less the happy and brilliant state in which the goodness of Brahma had placed it."

"My dear friend," said the Sultan, "Mahomed will forgive me if what you have just told me lacks holy sanctity."

"Sire," answered Amanzai, "these are but preliminary reflections we believe, are not useless."

"They are futile," replied Schah-Baham. "And that is just what I dislike. You would highly oblige me if you would discontinue irrelevant discourses."

"I shall execute your orders," answered Amanzai, "I only want to impart to Your Majesty that Brahma rarely permits us to keep in memory our former state, especially when he has inflicted upon us some particularly painful experience. This can be proved by the

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fact that I remember perfectly well that I was once a divan."

"A divan!" exclaimed the Sultan. "It cannot be! Do you think I am an ostrich to tell me such stories. I feel like burning you for telling me such puerile stuff."

"Your clement Majesty is in bad temper today. It is not in your august character to doubt anything and yet you do not believe that a man could be a sofa."

"Do you believe it?" asked the Sultan overwhelmed. He could not conscientiously credit what Amanzai related. "Am I a mussulman just for nothing?"

"Marvellous!" answered the Sultana, "well then, you merely listen to Amanzai and do not believe him, if you so desire."

"Ah yes," resumed the Sultan, "it is not because of its incredibility that I must disbelieve it, but were it even true I ought not believe it. I understand well that this is a paradox. So you were a divan, my boy? That must have been a terrible adventure. And tell me, were you ornamented?"

"Yes, Sire," replied Amanzai. "The first divan into which my soul entered was rose colored and elaborately embroidered with silver threads."

"So much the better!" said the Sultan. "You must have been a beautiful piece of furniture. By the way, why did your Brahma turn you into a sofa rather than

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into anything else? And what was the end of this merry adventure?"

"This was to punish my soul for its intemperance," replied Amanzai. "No matter in what body Brahma placed my soul, it never seemed contented, so he thought it best to humiliate me by turning me first into a divan, then into a reptile."

"I remember that when my soul once left the body of a woman it entered into that of a young man. As he was a flirt, a mischief maker, a slanderer, a great connoisseur of trifles, who cared only about his garments, his dressing and a thousand other insignificant details, my soul could hardly notice that its abode had been changed."

"I should very much like to know," interrupted Schah-Baham, "what you did when you were a woman. This must have been a very interesting experience. I always believed that women are endowed with the strangest peculiarities. I don't know whether I am explicit enough, but I want to convey that one can hardly divine what transpires in their elastic minds."

"Possibly we would be far wiser and more enlightened if we believed that they had less delicacy than the world supposes," replied Amanzai. "It seems to me that when I was a woman I laughed immoderately at those who attributed to me depth which I did not possess. I was amused at those who looked for reason when there was only caprice, and who sought

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profundity in me but could never understand me. In fact, I was sincere at the time when I was believed false; I was believed to be a coquette at times when I was honestly tender; I was sensitive while I was considered indifferent. One nearly always ascribed to me characteristics I never possessed or which I already ceased to have.

“Even those who were most interested in fathoming what they conceived as my complex nature, and from whom I concealed least of my natural self, neither knew me nor trusted me. When I displayed the indiscretions of my nature and exhibited the violence of my passion, and betrayed the innermost secrets of my life and the truest feelings of my heart—even then I elicited little understanding. People judged me according to their own preconceived notions, and these were largely false.”

“Oh, I know it,” said the Sultan. “As you remarked, one can never know women too well, and it has been a long time since I gave up unravelling their mysteries. But let us drop this topic. For it excites you and prevents you from answering my questions. I wanted to know what you had been doing while you were a woman.”

“I have only a very imperfect recollection of what I did then. What I remember most clearly is that I was very gallant in my youth; that I knew neither hatred nor love; that being born without any char-

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acter I was what people wanted me to be, and what my interests and pleasures required me to be. I recall also that after having lived a riotous and disorderly life in spite of my native prudence, I died after I had extracted a due measure of amusement and pleasure from my conduct.

"Probably even then I must have taken a keen delight in divans. Therefore, Brahma imprisoned me in such a manner. He desired that my soul should retain all its faculties while in this prison, not that he wanted to make my lot sweeter, but to make me more conscious of my punishment. He added also that my soul would be liberated only after two virtuous persons had consummated their abandon upon me."

"That is a strange situation—be so kind as to explain this to me," demanded the Sultana.

"Assuredly," replied the Sultan. "I like clarity in story telling. As you are not of my opinion, I have nothing against Amanzai's being as obscure as he seems to you to be. Thanks to the Prophet, Amanzai will never be obscure to me."

"I recall distinctly," continued Amanzai, "that my soul dwelt in a divan for a considerable length of time and were it not for a privilege extended by the great Brahma, which permitted my soul to enter various divans at various times, my existence would have been dull and painful.

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"This newly acquired liberty furnished me with an amount of variety which made my life less wearisome. Besides, my soul was just as fond of another's peculiar situation as it was when it animated a woman. The pleasure of being able to enter secret places and to be the third party in a game that was believed to be played by two, made my punishment milder.

"After having pronounced his verdict, Brahma himself lead my soul into a divan that servants had just brought to a lady of quality who was believed to be extremely virtuous, but if it is true that no man can be a hero in the eyes of his slave, I might also say, that there is no woman who is virtuous in the eyes of her divan."

Chapter II

WHICH WILL NOT PLEASE EVERYONE

“**N**OW, a divan is never used to furnish a public chamber, so I was placed by the lady to whom I belonged into a room separated from the rest of the palace. It was here, she said, that she was accustomed to come frequently to meditate on her duties, to raise her soul to Brahma. When I entered the room, I could hardly believe, judging by its embellishments, that the room was destined for such serious purposes. Not that it was too sumptuous nor that everything seemed too studied. At first glance, everything seemed more noble than elegant, but when examined at leisure one could find its hypocritical luxury; furniture of a certain mould and other articles that austerity never invents or uses. It seemed to me that even my color was too gay for a woman who professed herself as being so far removed from coquetterie.

“A short while after I had been in the room, my mistress entered. She glanced at me indifferently; she seemed contented but did not praise me; and dis-

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missed her servants in a cold and distracted manner. As soon as she found herself alone, her gloomy and severe manner disappeared. I saw a different attitude; different expression. She assayed me with such minute care it was clear that she would not use me for mere adornment. This voluptuous examination, the tender gay air she assumed, did not shake within me the high opinion she enjoyed in Agra.

"I knew that people who are believed to be so perfect, have always their favorite vices, often fought against, but nearly always triumphing. I also knew that those persons who seem to sacrifice pleasures, occasionally enjoy them with great sensuality, and that their virtue rather consists of repentance than of abstinence. I concluded that Fatmé was indolent.

"She then opened a small secret chest, very skilfully concealed in the wall. She drew out a book. From this closet she went to another in which many tomes were gorgeously displayed. She chose another volume and threw it upon me with weariness. Then she immersed herself in the soft cushions that covered me."

"Tell me, Amanzai," interrupted the Sultan, "was your charming lady pretty?"

"Yes, Sire," answered Amanzai, "she was much prettier than she appeared to be. One could even feel, that with less modesty, this frivolous disposition

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that inspired mistrust but also excited ardent desire, would not yield to anybody. Her features were beautiful, but lacked depth and vivacity—they expressed only vanity and scorn. Women of her type believe that only such qualities suggest an appearance of virtue. Everything in her bearing indicated at first abandonment and then mistrust. Though she was beautifully built, her carriage was neglected. If she assumed a noble attitude when walking, it was because a slow and dignified manner agrees with those whose minds are occupied with serious things. But her hatred of finery was not so unsightly as to make virtue disgusting. Her dresses were simple and of a sombre color; in their modesty one could find nobleness and refinement. Under the austerity of her attire one could easily discern that she loved such elegant cleanliness that bordered on sensuality.

“The book she last took did not seem to interest her much. This was a voluminous collection of meditations composed by a Brahmin. Either she had enough of her own, or that these reflections did not deal with problems in which she was concerned, she dismissed it as lacking interest, and took another volume from the secret closet. It was a romance that contained tender situations and vivid illustrations. This book agreed so little with her seeming severity, that I could hardly suppress my amazement at her readiness to peruse it. ‘I am certain,’ I thought, ‘that she only wants

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to test herself to learn to what extent she can resist impulses that trouble others so much.'

"Without guessing the reasons why Fatmé acted in a manner so contrary to the principles I believed she had, I still had a good opinion of her. Nevertheless, this book seemed to engage her; her eyes became animated. Finally she put it aside, not with the intention of forgetting the scenes it presented, but to abandon herself to them with voluptuousness. When she wearied of indulging herself in her sensuous reverie and was ready to resume her reading she heard a noise. She concealed the volume of love and replaced it with the contemplative work of the Brahmin, that she in truth utilized for display, rather than for enjoyment.

"A man entered. His demeanor was so respectful, that in spite of the nobleness of his carriage and the richness of his attire I mistook him for Fatmé's slave. She received him so roughly, she spoke to him as harshly, she seemed to be so shocked by his presence and so annoyed by his speech that I commenced to believe that this ill-treated man could not be anybody else but her husband,—and I was not wrong. She rejected with such harshness his earnest, insistent prayers to approach her; she crushed him with her tiresome details concerning his incessant errors. This most unfortunate of all husbands in Agra, accepted this unbearable conduct so meekly, that I was dis-

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gusted with him. The opinion he had about Fatmé's virtue was not the only reason for his docility. Fatmé was beautiful and though she did not care to arouse his desires, she inspired them. Regardless of how unpleasant she wanted to appear to her husband, she awoke his tenderness. The most timid lover, speaking for the first time of his affections to a woman of the world whom he fears the most, would not be more embarrassed than this husband when telling his wife of the impressions she produced upon him. He urged her tenderly and respectfully to respond to his ardor. For a long time she defended herself, but reluctantly she finally yielded to him.

"Though she was so obstinate in refusing him what he desired, I could perceive that she was less immune than she wanted to appear. Her eyes became animated, she grew more attentive, she sighed, and though with nonchalance, she became more active. But still it was not her husband whom she loved. I do not know what Fatmé's thoughts were. However, tender words succeeded the arrogant ones she met him with on his arrival. Apparently he did not discover her motives, or he was indifferent to them, and this coolness on his part and his distraction displeased Fatmé. Without reason, she started a quarrel. In an instant she saw in her husband the most odious vices. What horrible manners he had! What debauchery! What dissipation! What a life! She

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crushed him with such insults that in spite of all his patience he was obliged to leave her. Fatmé was angry at his departure. The disturbance in her eyes, which was less obscure to me than to her husband, bore witness that it was not by the absence of her husband that she wanted to be calmed. It was even before she pronounced a few singular phrases after her husband had left, that I thoroughly understood what she desired.

"This woman, the model and terror of all other women in Agra, who was so hated and still imitated by them, who considered the least constraint of passion as hypocrisy, if only others could contemplate her in the solitude of her boudoir as I could!"

"Indeed," said the Sultan, "was this a woman who in her heart concealed great passion? There are many such who make a show of chastity,—it happens often. One must not think that it is extraordinary. You understand me, I trust."

"From Your Majesty's comment," resumed Amanzai, "it is not very difficult to divine what she desired and without boasting of my subtlety, I dare say I grasped your insinuations."

"Well, what did I think then?" asked the Sultan, laughing.

"That Fatmé was entirely different than she pretended to be," answered Amanzai.

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"Exactly," exclaimed the Sultan. "Continue. You really have a fine mind."

"Fatmé apparently eluded pleasure only to indulge in it with more abandon," continued Amanzai. "She was not the sort of woman who, after dissipating her youth in splendor with fashionable young men, disguises and dissimulates in her advanced age. She was not the sort, who after having earned the contempt and shame of her time wants later to be its example and ornament. Such are more contemptible in the pretended virtues they lack, than in the vices they practice with such audacity. No, Fatmé was more prudent. Fortunate enough to be born with this falsehood that inspires in women the necessity of disguising and the need for esteem, she felt at the proper time that it is not possible to escape pleasure without leading a life of the most cruel weariness, and that a woman can not enjoy pleasure openly without being exposed to shame and danger that make her life bitter. Being accustomed from her earliest childhood to pretense, she thought less of reproving the vicious inclinations of her heart than of concealing them under the cloak of austere virtue. Was her soul voluptuous? I would not say so. This was not Fatmé's character. Her soul was destined for pleasure. Lacking delicacy, but sensual, she devoted herself to vice without knowing love. She was not quite twenty and she had already been married five years. That

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which ordinarily causes the seduction of women did not apply in her case. An attractive face and fine mind may have inspired in her certain desires, but she did not yield to them. She chose her lovers among those who could not be suspected of conducting clandestine affairs. Among those, whose occupations forced them to conceal their pleasure; among those whose low social position put them beyond any public suspicion, but whose liberality attracted her; and among those whose professions seemed to unfit them for the sweet mystery of love.

“Fatmé was in addition, wicked, shrewish and proud, and without endangering her character yielded to her fancies. She had not a single fault that she would not employ to further the reputation she enjoyed. Haughty, imperious, harsh, cruel, without consideration or faith, without friendship, or zeal for Brahma, the sorrow caused by the intemperance of others and her desire to alleviate them, veneered and honoured her vices. It was to accomplish this noble purpose that she may have injured others. She was so saintly vindictive. Her soul was so pure. How can one suspect so righteous, so sincere a heart, of being prompted in its hatreds by personal motives?

Chapter III

WHICH CONTAINS INCIDENTS HIGHLY IMPROBABLE.

“**A**FTER her husband's departure, Fatmé resumed her reading, when an aged Brahmin came in, followed by two old ladies whose consoler and tyrant he was. Fatmé rose up and received them so modestly and so devotedly, that it was impossible to mistake the situation. The old Brahmin prevented her even from prostrating herself, but he did it in such a haughty manner that the nature of the man became apparent to me. He seemed to be so satisfied by what she did for him; so convinced that he deserved still more, that I could hardly refrain from laughing at the stupid vanity of this ridiculous individual.

“It is very difficult, except among people of quality, to converse without speaking ill of others. People that live in dissipation do not slander often. For those who are devoted to ridiculous things, slander is but an amusement; they are not perfect enough to make a profession of it. They sometimes hurt,

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but it is not their intention to do so. Their thoughtlessness and taste for pleasure restrain them from keeping it up or profiting by it. This caustic manner of speaking about others, which they believe is necessary to those whom they slander, otherwise it would be condemnable, — this manner of ill-speaking is unknown to them.”

“Won’t you soon finish?” interrupted the Sultan angrily, “Are not your comments again at a tangent?”

“But, Sire,” replied Amanzai, “There are instances when they are indispensable.”

“And I believe that is not true and even if it were ——. But since I am the one to whom the story is narrated, tell it according to my taste. Entertain me, but please give up all the morals that add nothing but a head-ache. You make a good story-teller, but I will be the one to put order in the story, and I swear on my word as a Sultan, I will kill the one who will dare to moralize. Now we will see how you will manage to escape it.”

“By preserving the reflections for myself, as they are not likely to please Your Majesty,” replied Amanzai.

“Excellent!” said the Sultan. “Continue.”

“One is never pleased by speaking ill of others unless he speaks well of himself. Fatmé and her visitors were too much aware of their own characteris-

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tic qualities, to discuss similar traits in others. Expecting that this would amuse them, they started a conversation which did not belie their natures. The old Brahmin, however, spoke well of a woman whom Fatmé knew, and this eulogy displeased her. Among all things that made her lose her temper, genuine love seemed to her to deserve the greatest blame. A woman who loved, be she endowed otherwise with the most distinguished qualities, could not escape Fatmé's hatred. But a woman practising the lowest and most odious vices, if her lover could not be named, was considered by Fatmé as a respectable person whose virtues were beyond any praise.

"The woman whom the Brahmin praised, was unfortunately for her, of the sort that elicited Fatmé's indignation. 'She is a lost woman, how can she deserve your praises?' asked Fatmé bitterly. The Brahmin pleaded that he did not know the condemnable morals of that woman and Fatmé charitably instructed him sufficiently upon the reasons that made her condemn the woman.

"'I do not doubt, Fatmé,' said one of her lady visitors, 'that in spite of your generosity and goodness, you have not the least idea of what I want to tell you. Nahami, this *Nahami*, whom we all have abused so much, retired from society; she does not even rouge any more.'

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“‘Alas!’ exclaimed Fatmé, ‘how praiseworthy this change would be, were it sincere.’

“‘But, madam, you are good natured and people with your character are liable to deception. I know it through my own experience, that those born with such candour and straightforwardness of the heart as yours, cannot imagine that there are people who unfortunately lack these qualities. After all it is a charitable defect to have too good an opinion of others. But let us return to Nahami. My heart fears that she did not abjure her errors sincerely. One more easily renounces rouge than vices and one assumes frequently a more reserved and modest air, in order to deceive the world of the intemperances one still practices, rather than to enter into a new life of virtue.’”

“My dear friend,” said Schah-Baham yawning, “this conversation bores me. For the love of me, do not continue. Those people of yours annoy me awfully. I conjure you on your conscience, don’t they annoy you? Have pity, and eliminate them!”

“Very gladly, Sire,” replied Amanzai. “After having gossiped about Nahami as much as they could, they indulged in general ill-speaking, so that in less than a moment, I knew all the scandals of Agra. After this calumny they amused themselves in the avaricious pastime of praising each other, and then they departed.”

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"I was sitting on thorns," said the Sultan, "You relieved me considerably, Amanzai. Do you give me your word that these people will not return?"

"Yes, Sire," answered Amanzai.

"Well then," said the Sultan, "In order to prove to what extent I appreciate your services, I am making you Emir. Besides, since you work with enthusiasm, I believe you will bring your story to a successful end. All that gives me pleasure, and besides I must encourage merit."

After having returned thanks, the new Emir continued thus:

"In spite of Fatmé's affable manner, I noticed that she was annoyed by the three visitors, quite as much as was Your Majesty and could she have had her own way she would have spent the day in other amusements than those afforded by her visitors.

"As soon as they went out Fatme began to dream deeply, but without melancholy. Her eyes softened and wandered languidly about the room. She seemed to desire strongly, something she missed and feared. Finally she called.

In answer, a young slave entered. His appearance was fresh, rather than agreeable. Fatmé, who looked at him with eyes where love and desire reigned, was irresolute and fearsome.

"'Close the door, Dahis,' she said to him, 'Come

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here. We are all alone. You may recollect without fear that you love me. Prove it to me!

"At this order, Dahis's dutiful air of a slave changed into that of a man who was made happy. He seemed to have little delicacy or tenderness. He was vivacious and ardent, overwhelmed with desire, but he lacked the art of satisfying it by degrees. He was ignorant of gallantry. He did not enter into details, but devoted himself to his passion. He was not a lover. This was all sufficient to Fatmé, who did not search for any subtleties. Dahis praised coarsely, but his lack of delicacy was not unpleasant to Fatmé, who considered herself sufficiently eulogized, when she was provided with ample proof that she aroused desires.

"Fatmé compensated herself with Dahis, for the reserve she was forced into by her husband. Hardly faithful to the severe laws of decency; her eyes sparkled; she called Dahis the most tender names; she bestowed upon him the most ardent caresses. She drew his attention to the beauties she abandoned to him, and forced him to require from her further proofs of her passion, proofs he himself did not desire.

"Dahis, however, seemed to be little concerned. He fixed his eyes stupidly upon the beauties Fatmé displayed before him. They hardly made any impression on him. His coarse soul did not respond;

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the pleasure which he enjoyed he failed to transmit to her. Fatmé was contented, however. Dahis's silence and stupidity did not injure her self-love, and she had too many good reasons to believe that he was affected by her charms. She preferred his indifferent air, to the most excessive eulogies and most vehement love transports of a fop.

"Fatme, having abandoned herself to the desires of Dahis, proved to have just as little delicacy as virtue. She did not require from him the vivacity of ecstasy; the tender little attentions that are the result of the fineness of the soul and the gallantry of manners which intensify the pleasure, or better, create the very essence of pleasure.

"Dahis after having yawned more than once left the room. He was that sort of pitiful person who never thinks; who never has anything to say and who is better off at work than at leisure.

"Regardless of the opinion I had of Fatmé, after her amusement with Dahis, I believed that since she had nothing in this room to meditate upon, she would leave it right after the departure of her slave. But I was mistaken. Shortly after, she began to relive the pleasure she had enjoyed with Dahis, when something occurred that gave her new food for reflection.

"A serious Brahmin, young and fresh, entered the room. Though his face was earnest it expressed vi-

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vacuity. In spite of his ecclesiastical cloth and though not accomplished in the social graces, he was glad to know, however, that he did not create the impression of being a prude. He was the most popular, the most consoling and the most sought-after Brahmin in Agra. He spoke so beautifully that people used to say, with what a sweetness he imposed upon souls the taste for virtue. How could one be led into sin under his auspices? It will soon be apparent what the particular reasons were, for giving him so much credit, and whether he merited it.

"This fortunate Brahmin approached Fatmé with an affectedly sweet and reserved air, rather serious than elegant. It was not because he did not want to assume a light expression, but because he copied wrongly those whom he imitated, and the Brahmin discarded his assumed masque of indifference.

"‘Queen of Hearts,’ he said to Fatmé in a soulful way, ‘you are today more beautiful than the Beings that are destined to serve Brahma! You exalt my soul to ecstasy, so celestial that I would like to share it with you.’

"Fatmé answered him languidly, but in the same manner, and they started a tender exchange of conversation which did not satisfy the cravings of love. Without their gestures, I believe I would never have comprehended this discourse.

"Fatme, who did not take much delight in elo-

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quence and who did not care for that of the Brahmin's soon tired of this kind of sentiment. The Brahmin who was as impatient with this formality as Fatmé was, discontinued the love prologue, and their affectedly sweet conversation, and ended the encounter in the same way as Dahis started.

"It is however true that though Fatmé indulged in the same frenzy she was now rather concerned with its outer effect. She wanted to appear delicate, and to impress the Brahmin with her complete abandon to his love.

"The Brahmin, who by his character and face resembled Dahis, was in no respect inferior to him, and deserved all the compliments the accommodating Fatmé made him so lavishly. After having satisfied their desires they turned virtue into ridicule, entertaining themselves with pleasures that deceive others; and gave each other lessons in hypocrisy. Finally these two odious persons separated, and she went to her husband in order to drive him to despair.

"All the time I was with her I never saw her enjoying her leisure time differently than I related just now to your August Majesty. Fatmé, prudent though she was, forgot herself sometime. One day, when Fatmé was alone with her Brahmin and was deep in the transports of love with him, her husband, who by mere chance found himself at the door of her room, happened to hear sighs and certain phrases that astonished

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him. Fatmé's public occupations gave little reason to imagine her being engaged in such private amusements, that I doubt whether her husband guessed the source of the sighs and strange words that assailed his ears. Whether he recognized his wife's voice or whether mere curiosity prompted him to find out what this adventure meant, he wanted to enter the room. Unfortunately for Fatmé the door was not locked. He opened it with little effort. The spectacle struck his eyes with such suddenness that even fury became temporarily suspended, and he did not know what course of action to take.

"'You perfidious thing!' he finally cried out, 'reap the penalty you deserve for your vices and hypocrisy,' and with these words, listening neither to Fatmé nor to the Brahmin, who fell at his feet, he killed them with his blows.

"Dreadful as this scene proved to be, I was not moved by it. They both deserved death too much, to be pitied. I was only delighted that this fearful catastrophe caused the whole of Agra to learn the truth about these persons whom everybody believed to be the models of virtue.

Chapter IV

WHERE UNFORESEEN INCIDENTS HAPPEN

AFTER Fatmé's death my soul took wing and flew to a palace, where everything seemed to be nearly the same as the one I just left, but in fact was quite different.

"The lady who dwelt there had not yet reached the age when women, while not condemning gallantry, consider it ridiculous. She was young and beautiful and it could not be said that she disliked virtue because it did not agree with love. Her simple and modest air, the trouble she took to do good deeds in concealment, and the peace that reigned in her heart bore witness that she was born with the high qualities she appeared to have. Chaste without constraint and vanity, she did her duty without complaining and without seeking any appreciation. I never saw her gloomy or grumbling; her virtue was sweet and undisturbed; she did not torment nor hate anybody. Her spirit was by nature bright and she did not seek to dim it. She did not believe as many others do, that one could not be very respectable, unless one is very annoying. She did not slander any one nor

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did she enjoy being slandered. Confident that she had as many weaknesses as others had, she would pardon them. She did not condemn anything as being vicious or criminal, unless it actually was. Quite contrary to Fatmé, she did not deny herself anything that was permitted, but avoided all that was forbidden. Her house was without any pomp, but was kept nobly. All honest people of Agra were honoured to be admitted there. Everybody wanted to know the lady of such rare character, and all respected her. In spite of my natural perversity, I was forced to agree with them.

“When I entered the house of this lady, I was still under the influence of Fatmé’s falsehoods. I was certain that this female was the same and thus at the first glance I confounded a virtuous woman with a hypocrite. I never saw a slave or Brahmin enter her room, who would make my divan the subject of their conversation. For a long time I was astonished to see that I existed for nothing. The idleness to which I was condemned in this house began to weary me and being convinced that I waited in vain for any experience, I left the sofa of this lady. I was delighted to find one virtuous woman, but I was not anxious to find another.

“In order to vary my previous experience, my soul on leaving this palace, did not want to enter another. It delighted in such an ugly, obscure little house that

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I doubted whether I would find anything there that would give me shelter. I penetrated a gloomy room furnished below mediocrity. I was fortunate enough to find there a dirty and shabby sofa, at whose expense all other pieces of furniture in this room evidently were purchased. This was the first impression I had of my surroundings and even after I knew them better I did not change my opinion.

“This room was the shelter of a fairly pretty young girl who by virtue of her birth and inclination found herself in bad company, and who entertained quite frequently men who are said to be of good company. She was a young dancer who was only recently received as one of the Emperor’s entertainers, and did not as yet have her fortune and reputation established, though she knew practically all the lords of Agra, upon whom she bestowed her favors and who assured her of their protection. I even doubt whether her fortune would in any way be advanced by their promises, were it not that the overseer of the Emperor’s domains took a fancy to her.

“By his birth and personal merits Abdalathif, this was the youth’s name, did not make a brilliant conquest. He was boorish and brutal, and from the moment fortune began to favor him, insolence joined his other defects. Not that he did not want to be polite, but being convinced that a man of his stand-



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ing bestows honor by merely showing regard, he copied the cool and dry politeness of people of certain rank. Abdalathif's case reached the climax of absurdity and impertinence. He was born in the most profound obscurity and tried not only to forget it, but he did his utmost to pretend an illustrious origin. He crowned his eccentricity by perpetually playing the part of a lord. He was vain and insolent. His familiarity was just as outrageous as his haughtiness. His magnificence being base and tasteless, it became an additional ridiculous trait of his character. Having little intelligence and still less education, he believed that he knew everything. He was however treated with excessive consideration by his acquaintances, because he was in a position to extend favors. The most powerful lords of Agra were his assiduous followers and flatterers. Even their wives were ready to forgive him his excessive impertinences toward them, and to comply with all his desires. And being sought after, he often became tired of the ever readiness of the ladies of quality, and used to look for less brilliant but not less intense pleasures that were (as he insolently was wont to say) scarcely less dangerous.

"One evening Amine left the Emperor before whom she danced and went with her new protector to her home. He allowed his gaze to wander with haughty distraction about this gloomy and obscure

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lodging and then deigning to raise his eyes a little he said:

“‘You are not comfortable in this place. I ought to take you out of here. It is for my sake and your own that I want you to be more decently lodged. I shall be mocked at for being associated with a girl whose mode of living does not induce respect.’

“After saying this he seated himself upon the divan, drew her down violently and permitted himself with her all the liberties he wanted. But since his debauchery was greater than his actual desires, the latter were not excessive. Amine, whom I had seen very haughty and capricious with other lords, was far from being familiar with Abdalathif. She treated him with extreme respect and did not dare look at him, unless he seemed to want her to.

“‘I like you very much,’ he finally said, ‘but I want you to be reasonable. Adieu, my little one,’ he said on arising. ‘Tomorrow you will hear from me. Your home is not supplied with the right furniture to enable me to have supper with you here. I will provide for it. Adieu!’

“With these words he left. Amine saw him respectfully out, and then she lay down on the divan in order to surrender to the joy caused by her good fortune and to count with her mother the diamonds and other riches she expected the next day from Abdalathif’s generosity. The mother, though a

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lady of honor, was the most convenient of mothers. She exhorted her daughter to behave wisely while enjoying the favor that it pleased Brahma to bestow upon them. She compared their future existence with that of the present. She made a thousand reflections about the providence of the gods, who do not abandon those who deserve their protection. She then enumerated all the lords who were her daughter's friends and said:

“Of what little use was their friendship to you, my child. This was your fault. I told you often that you were born too sweet. You either give yourself through mere indolence, which is a great vice, or through fancy, which is still worse, because it makes you ridiculous. I do not mean to say that one must not satisfy oneself once in a while. God forbid! But one must not sacrifice to pleasure to such an extent, as to cause comment. A girl like you cannot afford to surrender to love, and you unfortunately have given quite enough in that direction. But since you are quite young I hope this will not do you much harm. Nothing spoils the reputation of a girl of your standing more than the frivolous rumours about bestowing gratuitous favors. When it becomes known that a girl has an unfortunate habit of surrendering occasionally for nothing, everybody believes himself to be entitled to the same consideration. Look at Roxane, Atalis, Elzire; they have

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no weakness to be reproached for. Even Brahma himself blesses their conduct. They are less beautiful than you, but look how rich they are. You ought to take an example from them; they are quite wise.'

"'Yes, mother, yes,' responded Amine, provoked by this exhortation. 'I shall think it over. But do you mean to advise me to remain only with this monster to whom I belong now? This is impossible, I am warning you.'

"'Not at all,' replied the mother, 'one cannot be the mistress of one's heart. I simply say that you must renounce the lords of the court, unless you will see them incognito, and they will act properly. If you desire, I shall speak to them. You have Massond, whom you love. He is a good choice; nobody knows him; he is very complying, and you will have him pretend that he is your father. This gentleman who now desires you, will be just as deceived as the others. Conduct yourself prudently—he will not doubt anything and . . .'

"'Do you think, mother,' the girl interrupted, 'that he will give me diamonds?' she paused, reflecting, then continued, 'Yes, I think he will. It is not because of my vanity that I believe so, but because a man of certain standing is glad to do as the world does.'

"Then she started to name the girls who would

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be jealous of her jewels and beautiful dresses. This flattered her more than the fortune itself.

“Early the next morning a carriage came for her. My soul, curious to see what use Amine would make of her mother’s advice, followed her. She was taken into a beautifully furnished house that Abdalathif owned in an obscure street. I entered a superb divan, magnificently ornamented. I never saw anybody in such a state of asinine admiration as Amine was. She was delighted with everything. Precious vases, a box-full of diamonds, beautifully dressed slaves, who waited on her with the utmost respect, merchants and servants who waited on her for her orders . . . all this caused and increased her intoxication.

“When she recovered her senses she thought of the role she ought to play before all the spectators. She spoke to her slaves haughtily, to the merchants and servants with impertinence, chose all that she wanted, ordered that all her commands be carried out not later than the next day. She went back to her dressing-room where she remained a long time; and while dreaming of the magnificences to which she was destined, she dressed herself in a superb déshabille that was made for a princess of Agra, and that she found beautiful enough to suit her. The greater part of the day she spent in admiring all she saw and in waiting for Abdalathif, who appeared about evening.

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“‘Well, my dear, how do you find all this?’

“She fell to his feet, and in the most effusive language she thanked him for all he had done for her.

“Being until now in affluent company, I was astonished to hear all this effusion. I had always heard a good deal of nonsense, but it was always elegant, at least, and owing to the noble way in which it was uttered, it seemed not to be foolish at all.

Chapter V

BETTER TO OMIT, THAN TO READ

BEFORE engaging in a lengthy conversation, Abdalathif drew from his pocket a long purse filled with gold and threw it carelessly on the table.

“Keep it,” he said to her, “You will hardly require it, for I will take care of the expenses of the house and of your personal needs as well. I have sent you a cook, who is, I believe, the best in Agra. I think I will have my suppers here quite often. We shall not always be alone. My friends of whom I borrow money will come here sometimes. They will join us and will make the suppers gay. I like them.”

“Then he conducted her into the little room where I was. Amine’s mother, who was present during the conversation, left the room and closed the door. I did not report to Your Majesty their exact conversation word for word,” Amanzai interrupted.

“Amine seemed to be tender and lively to a point of ecstasy. Abdalathif informed her first of all that he disliked women who were reserved in their speech.

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Your Majesty can imagine that due to her desire to please Abdalathif, and also in view of her lack of education and acquired customs, their conversation was of a nature difficult to repeat."

"Why so?" asked the Sultan, "I might find it quite excellent. Let me hear some of the phrases they employed."

"Listen," said the Sultana arising, "as I am sure they will not amuse me, I think I will leave."

"Look at her!" exclaimed the Sultan, "what modesty! You surely think that you can fool me? You are mistaken. I know the present day women, and besides, I remember a man who knows them just as well as I do, or nearly as well, and who told me that women enjoy nothing more than that which is forbidden; and take delight in discourse that they should not even listen to. And consequently, if you leave, this does not mean that you have a desire to leave. However, when I shall go to bed Amanzai will relate to me that which you do not want him to tell now. I will not lose anything thereby. Is it not true?" Amanzai was obliged to agree with the Sultan, and after having thus exaggerated the prudence of his conduct continued:

"After Amine's and Abdalathif's embraces, which were more lengthy than interesting, supper was served. As I was not in the dining room, I cannot, Sire, give you an account of their conversation. After

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what seemed a long time they returned. Their tête-à-tête supper did not make them more sober. After several questionable stories, Abdalathif fell asleep on the bosom of his fair friend.

"Amine, compliant though she was to his amorous whims, was very much dissatisfied, because Abdalathif permitted himself so much liberty with her. Her vanity suffered because he seemed to value her so little. The praises he lavished upon her during their previous caresses made her so proud that she believed she deserved all the more attention. In spite of the obligations she owed him. She was exceedingly annoyed by the constraint to which he subjected her, and she would have dwelt upon it at length, had not Abdalathif opened his sleep-laden eyes, and abruptly asked the time. He rose, not listening to her answer.

"'Adieu,' he said, caressing her brutally, 'I shall let you know tomorrow whether I will have supper with you here.'

"When he had said this, he attempted to leave. However, Amine desiring to be left alone, thought she ought to make an effort to detain him and thus manifested her falseness by crying because of his departure. He was inflexible and freed himself from her arms, telling her that he wanted her to love him, but not to be in his way.

"As soon as he went out, she rang the bell, honor-

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ing him in a low voice with all the epithets he deserved. While her slaves were undressing her, her mother came in and whispered to her. The news that the mother brought, prompted Amine to hasten the slaves to finish their duties and ordered them to leave her all alone. A few moments later her mother came in again, accompanied by an ugly and horrible looking negro. No sooner had she seen him than she began to kiss him passionately."

"Amanzai," said the Sultan, "if you eliminate this negro from your story, I do not think that it would be the worse for the omission."

"I fail to see wherein he spoils my story," replied Amanzai.

"As long as you have not sense enough to see it yourself, I will tell you," answered the Sultan, "The first wife of my grand-father, Schah-Riar, slept with all the negroes in her palace. This was, the Lord be thanked, quite notorious. Consequently my grand-father not only ordered her strangulation, but also those who succeeded her, until my grand-mother, Scheherazade, who induced him to discontinue this odious habit. And so, after what has happened in my family, I find it unnecessary to be told about negroes, in whom I must not be interested. Since that negro already appeared in your story, let him stay; but please do not permit him to appear again."

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Amanzai after having apologized for his thoughtlessness continued:

“Ah! Massond,” said Amine to her lover, ‘how I suffered these two days without you. How I hate the monster that at present possesses me. How unhappy is the one who worships at the shrine of fortune.’

“To all this Massond answered but little. He told her, however, that he loved her tenderly, and that he did not mind the attentions Abdalathif paid her. He then advised her to do everything possible to ruin him, and indulging themselves with all their fury in caresses they started a love combat whose vivacity was augmented by the knowledge that they were betraying Abdalathif. Before leaving the room she paid Massond quite generously for the extreme love he showed her. She spent the greater part of the night with him and sent him away at sunrise. Her mother, who brought him in through a door that led from her room to her daughter’s, showed him out by the same way.

“Amine spent the afternoon in trying on all the gowns she received and in ordering new ones. This amusement lasted until the hour when she had to dance before the Emperor. She was conveyed home by Abdalathif. They were followed by some pretty girl-companions of Amine, by some dignitaries and three most renowned dandies of Agra. They were

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very eager to praise Abdalathif's magnificence, his taste, his noble air, the fineness of his mind. I could not realize how people, who due to their birth and talents held such distinguished positions, could praise anybody in such a base and false manner. They did not even forget to praise Amine, but to tell the truth, the manner in which they did it made her feel like a subaltern, and were it not that they wanted to satisfy Abdalathif, they would have treated her with more familiarity and less respect. When they were through praising Abdalathif, they betook themselves to the salon which he assigned to them. Their conversation was sometimes lively, sometimes dull, but in general they did not speak too politely to the ladies who came to have supper with Amine and they did not seem offended in the slightest degree.

"Finally the whole company came down to have supper. As there was no shelter for me in the room where they ate, I could not hear their conversation, but judging by their behaviour after their repast, I was not sorry that I had not been present. Abdalathif overpowered by wine and drunk by flattery did not fail to fall asleep. One young man who was very much interested in remaining alone with Amine, woke Abdalathif and convinced him that a man of Abdalathif's importance is very necessary to the state, that while he might enjoy certain amusement, he must never neglect his duties. He then

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proved to him so convincingly how necessary he was to the Prince and to the people, that Abdalathif was persuaded that if he went to bed, the State would run a chance of losing one of its most important pillars.

“Abdalathif went out and everybody followed him. The looks which Amine and the young man who delivered his oration to Abdalathif exchanged, convinced me that he would soon be back. She carelessly began to undress and getting rid of her superb attire, which might interfere with amorous embraces, requested to be left alone. Amine’s respectable mother who was deeply won over by the story of the young man who told her how much he suffered, (I could hardly believe that she would be interested) lead him secretly into her daughter’s apartment, and did not retire before he gave her his word that he would make no advances to her daughter, that might alarm this chaste and modest girl. When they were alone Amine said to the young man:

“‘Really, I must love you very tenderly in order to do what I am doing. For, after all, I am betraying an honest man, whom I do not love, but to whom, however, I ought to be faithful. I am unjust toward Abdalathif. I feel it, but love is an overwhelming thing, and this that I am indulging in today does not suit my character.’

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“‘I should be glad to obtain your love,’ answered the young man and wanted to embrace her.

“‘This I will not permit,’ she said repulsing him, ‘Confidence, sentiments, pleasure to see you—all this I have promised you. If I would go any further I should betray my duties.’

“‘But my child,’ he said, ‘are you mad? What language do you use? I thought you were possessed by all the sentiments in the world and now what do you want us to do with them? Why am I here?’

“‘You are mistaken if you expect from me anything else,’ she answered, ‘Though I do not love Abdalathif, I made a vow to be true to him, and nothing in the world would make me break my word.’

“‘My little queen,’ he said rallying, ‘since you made a vow I have nothing to say—it is very decent of you. In view of the rarity I shall permit you to live up to your word. By the way, how many similar vows did you make in your life?’

“‘Don’t talk absurdities!’ Amine answered, ‘I am quite scrupulous!’

“‘You do not understand me at all,’ he answered, ‘you girls have scruples, and you have more of them than the virtuous women. But in reference to your vow, you should have spoken of it to me before I came here to spend the night with you.’

“‘That is true,’ she answered in an embarrassed

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way, 'but you made me such brilliant propositions that I forgot all about it.'

"Did your reflection cause you to refuse my offer?" he took out his purse and said, 'this is what I have promised you. I am a man of honor. You will find in it that which will heal your scruples and relieve you of all the vows that you have made. You agree with me, don't you?'

"What a jester you are," she said grabbing the purse, 'But you know me very little. I swear to you that were it not for the inclination I have for you . . .'

"Let us finish with all that," he interrupted, 'To prove to you how noble I am, I dispense with your thanks and with your inclinations. I do not think they will do me any good. (I am paying you a price as dearly as if I were your first lover, and you know that it is not in the rules.)'

"I think that it is so," Amine answered, 'for I am committing perfidy for your sake.'

"I beg of you, let us drop all that, though you are very clever this conversation annoys me.'

"Impatient as he was he could not stop the prudent Amine from counting the money that he had just given her. It was not because she distrusted him, but as she said, he could have made an error in counting. She did not surrender to his desires before having made certain that he made no error in his arithmetic.

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"Shortly before day-break Amine's mother came in and told the young man that it was time to leave. He was, however, of a different opinion. Though Amine asked him to spare her reputation, her pleas would not disturb him. If she had not promised to grant him in the future as many nights as she would be able to steal away from Abdalathif, he would have stayed in spite of her requests.

"Outside of Abdalathif, Massond and the young man to whom she occasionally kept her word, Amine, who had recognized the usefulness of her mother's advice, received all those men who found her beautiful enough to desire her favors, providing that her visitors were rich enough. Bonzes, brahmins, imans, military men, cadis, men of all nations, of all kinds, of all ages, none was refused. It is true that since she had principles and scruples, she charged foreigners and those whom she considered infidels a higher price than her compatriots and men of her own creed. Only their money could overcome the repugnance she felt for them, and could triumph over her remorse after she had surrendered. In addition to this she had made some peculiar arrangements. There were certain religions that she detested more than others and I will always remember that for her favors she charged a giebree (an infidel, in the language of the Mussulmans) more than she charged ten Mahometans.

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"Whether Abdalathif was too convinced of her merits to believe that she might be unfaithful, or which is also ridiculous, conjectured that he relied upon her oath that she would never belong to anybody else but to him, he always lived in perfect security, and were it not for an unforeseen event, he would have always trusted her."

"I understand," said the Sultan, "somebody told him that she was untrue."

"No, Sire," answered Amanzai.

"O, yes," replied the Sultan, "now I can see that it was something else entirely. I can easily guess it, he himself caught her."

"Nothing of the sort," retorted Amanzai, "He would have been too happy to have learned of her faithlessness quite so easily."

"Then I do not know what it was," said Schah-Baham, "and besides, it is not my affair. I am not going to think too strenuously in order to decipher a riddle in which I have no interest."

Chapter VI

AS EXTRAORDINARY AS IT IS AMUSING

THE fatal moment came when the greatness, the diamonds and the riches that Amine possessed disappeared. As a consolation for her losses, there remained at least a recollection of a beautiful dream, and if it is to be supposed that Abdalathif had had his dream also, it was not as beautiful as hers.

“For a few days past, I had noticed that Amine was sadder than usual. Her house was closed at night and during the day she did not see anybody except Abdalathif. She received many letters, but all of them worried her. I thought of many reasons, in an effort to determine the cause of her sorrow, but as I could not understand nature, I was foolish enough to believe that remorse caused her grief, although what I did know of her character should have excluded this idea as impossible. Before much time elapsed, I realized the error of my deduction.

“With an embarrassed, thoughtful and gloomy air Amine made her toilette one morning. Abdalathif came in. She blushed as she saw him. She was not

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used to seeing him in the morning and this unexpected visit displeased her. Confused and timid she hardly dared to lift her eyes. By Abdalathif's frowns, by the terrible glances he cast every now and then at her, it was not difficult to judge that he was tortured by some painful experience of which she was the cause. Amine undoubtedly knew what all this was about, but she never dared ask him. For sometime he kept silent.

"'You are magnificent,' he finally said with an ironic fury. 'You are very delicate, and very faithful. I should say so, my queen, I should say so. But I know how to teach you to be decent and to place you in such a position which will force you to be chaste for sometime to come.'

"'What does this discourse mean, Sir?' she answered haughtily, 'is that the way to address a person like me? You might choose your reprimands with discretion.'

"Amine's insolence seemed in this present situation so peculiar to Abdalathif that at first he was puzzled, but soon overwhelmed by fury, he showered her with insults and contempt. Amine wanted to justify herself, but Abdalathif who undoubtedly had convincing proof of her crimes, ordered her roughly to keep her peace. At that moment Amine admitted that Abdalathif had reason to complain, but as she could hardly believe that it was on her

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account that she did not return to the same subject. She rather thought that it was her turn to crush him with reproaches of his infidelity, and, even remonstrating with him on his bad taste; all that she had not mentioned to him, she added because of the extreme interest she dared to take in everything that concerned him. The impudence provoked him to such an extent that he decided to leave her. Amine saw that he was not deceived, neither by her haughtiness, nor by her reproaches. Fearing that Abdalathif's fury might cause this scene to end very tragically for her, she thought it best to start shedding tears and to appear submissive. But all this was in vain. Nothing could calm Abdalathif. I will not tell you all the particulars, but I never saw anybody so savage. Every now and then such fury came over him that he was ready to break everything in the house, had he not paid for it. This reasonable consideration kept him from giving vent to his anger in a way which might have given him relief. The violence with which he contained himself still increased his anger toward Amine. What made him most furious was the cruel lack of appreciation on the part of those who owed him gratitude, and according to his due this was most improper conduct.

"After delivering himself of all the impertinences that his fury and conceit had dictated, he began to take possession of everything that he had presented to

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Amine. She expected that Abdalathif would desert her, but she thought that the diamonds and other things at which she glanced every now and then would be left for her. This was her consolation. But when she saw the pitiless Abdalathif taking possession of these valuables she uttered such piercing and painful cries that her mother rushed in, cast herself at his feet, and tried to appease him by confessing that a cursed bonze caused all the trouble. Far from being pacified by the story of the bonze he was determined to take the most vigorous measures.

“‘Alas!’ said Amine’s mother sadly, ‘we are justly punished for trusting an infidel. My daughter knows what I thought of him and I have always said that he would bring us misfortune.’

“During this lamentation Abdalathif, having in his hand a list of everything that he had presented to Amine, thus came into possession of every article in the house.

“‘As to the money that I gave you,’ he said to Amine severly, ‘I leave it with you. It is not my fault, little one, that you are not more fortunate. These sorrows will make you more prudent and I desire that sincerely. You may go,’ he said, ‘I don’t need you here. Thank Providence that I did not manifest my anger any further.’

“When he finished, he commanded his slaves to order them out and was no more moved by the atro-

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cious taunts they vomited against him than by the tears they shed before him.

"Being curious to see what use Amine would make of her humiliation, I decided in spite of their disgusting morals, to follow them to their old obscure house, from which Abdalathif had taken them and where they returned to hide their shame, and the pain caused by the fact that they could not ruin him. In that gloomy place I witnessed the regrets and the imprecations of the virtuous mother. The considerable remains of their fortune consoled them for the losses they had suffered.

"'Listen, my daughter,' said the mother one day to Amine, 'are you really overwhelmed by this great calamity? I admit that the monster to whom you belonged was extremely liberal, but is he the only one that desires your favors? Besides, if you do not find one who is as rich as Abdalathif, do you think this ought to make you despair? No, my daughter, where there is no quality one must look for quantity. If four will not be sufficient to replace him, take ten, take even more if you find it necessary. You will say that this is unduly dangerous. True, but one who does not brave chance, who fears everything, can never get out of his misery and obscurity.'

"Amine desired very much to make use of her mother's sagacious advice, but the state of abandonment in which she found herself made her unable to

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do it immediately. Her adventure with Abdalathif earned her a bad reputation. Except for Massond, whose fidelity was beyond reproach, I did not see anybody come to her for a long time. Only a few of her girl companions visited her, rather to enjoy her misfortune than to console her.

“But time, that eradicates all things, also erased the evil reputation that Amine now enjoyed. It was believed that she had changed. The world thought that she had had plenty of time to profit by her reflections in regard to her inexcusable infidelities, and lovers began to visit her. One Persian gentleman who had just arrived in Agra, saw Amine and found her to be so beautiful that he became extremely anxious to make a friend of her. This desire was fanned by one of those men who made it their noble business to procure pleasure for others. He assured the Persian that if Amine would show him favor, he would enjoy the keenest pleasure for he would be the first to whom she would have surrendered. All others thought it would be impossible to approach her. Even the Persian found it to be extraordinarily difficult. This novelty excited his curiosity, and through an irreproachable witness of Amine’s virtue he bought her favors at the highest price, while in Agra her favors were of little or no value and were held in contempt in many quarters.

“Amine left once more her gloomy house and

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changed it for a superb palace in which all the magnificence of India was displayed. I do not know whether Amine made use of her new fortune in a reasonable manner, for my soul having wearied of observing her, went in search of objects more deserving of attention. These were also contemptible at bottom, but they were more brilliant and would greatly amuse my soul.

"I flew into a house where magnificence and good taste reigned in every corner. This house appeared to be one in which I would like to live. Here one could always find pleasure and gallantry. If there was any vice, it was always under a screen of love; it was adorned with such delicacy and elegance that it appeared seductive.

"The mistress of this palace was so charming; her eyes were so soft; her countenance so beautiful, that my soul would find there ample entertainment. For some time she did not even deign to sit on the sofa where I was. But she loved and was loved. Followed by her lover, and inwardly disturbed herself, it became clear to me that she would not always be so indifferent to me as she was. When I made her divan my dwelling place, her lover had already received permission to tell her about his affection, and though he was so passionate and pleaded his desires so ardently, he seemed far from conquering her.

"It was very painful to Phenime (that was her

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name) to renounce her virtue. Zulma, who was too respectful to be enterprising waited until time and his tender care would make her love him just as he loved her. Though better informed than he of Phenime's disposition, I could not understand why he failed to make her happy. To tell the truth, Phenime had not as yet told him that she loved him, but her eyes said it always. She did not even notice that her voice became tender and her expression lively. The more she tried to restrain her feelings, the more love she showed. She was not indifferent to anything that concerned her lover. And she feared her capitulation. The men she loved the least were apparently treated better by her than he was. Sometimes she forced silence upon him, but she forgot that immediately, and continued the conversation she had halted. Each time he found her alone (she was not even aware that she gave him a thousand occasions to find her alone,) she became unconsciously possessed of the most tender and pronounced emotions. During a long and animated discourse when Zulma kissed her hand or fell on his knees, Phenime became agitated, but not angry. She expressed her disturbance in the same tender way she complained against Zulma's continuous pursuits."

"And yet he did not continue them?" interrupted the Sultan.

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"No, Sire," answered Amanzai, "The more he was in love. . . ."

"The more foolish he was," finished the Sultan, "I can see that."

"Love is never more timid, than when . . ." began Amanzai.

"Yes, timid," interrupted the Sultan, "what a delightful story. Didn't he sense that he taxed her patience? Were I in her place I would have repulsed him forever."

"There is no doubt that with a coquette Zulma might not have lost, but Phenime, who really desired not to be conquered, appreciated her lover's timidity. Besides, the more he spared Phenime's scruples, the surer was his victory. If a moment offered by caprice is not seized it may never return, but when it is offered by love it seems that the less one seizes it, the more frequently it recurs."

"But still I heard that women do not like to be misunderstood."

"This happens sometime," answered Amanzai, "but Phenime thought differently. She loved Zulma the most when he was even more respectful than she desired.

"And did he misunderstand her often?" asked the Sultan.

"Yes, Sire," answered Amanzai, "quite often and sometimes he used to misunderstand her so grossly

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that it was simply ridiculous. It happened once, for example, that he visited Phenime. An hour before his arrival she was immersed in her affection for him and did not think of anything else but of Zulma. She began to desire him ardently; her imagination became gradually inflamed; she voluptuously abandoned herself to this amorous disorder. When her feelings reached the apex, Zulma came in. Her uneasiness increased and she commenced blushing, when she saw him. If he had only fathomed the cause of her blushes! If he would only urge her now! But instead, feeling quite uneasy because of some innocent liberty he had attempted to take with her the other day, he began to apologize, though she had not felt offended."

"What a fool!" cried out the Sultan, "it is hard to believe one could be such a fool!"

"Do not be so astonished, Sire," answered Amanzai, "during all the time that I was a divan I saw more moments missed than taken advantage of. Women who are accustomed to conceal their thoughts, concentrate all their attention on the dissimulation of their emotions and if they do not surrender, the fact is less due to their virtue than to the opinion they wish to create.

"I remember I once lived at the palace of a lady, whose rare virtue was notorious. For a long time I

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did not see anything that could break down the good reputation she enjoyed. It is true that she was not pretty. I must admit that there are no women who can so easily conserve their virtue as unattractive ones. In addition to her homeliness she had a rude, hard nature that repelled people in the same fashion that her face did. Although none attempted to inflame her affection, still it was not believed that it could be done. I do not know how it happened, but one man who was more daring or more capricious than the others, or perhaps he did not believe in the virtue of women, approached her when she was all alone and had the audacity enough to tell her that she was lovely. Though he said it coolly in order not to appear very serious it produced a great impression upon her. She answered modestly but not without uneasiness, that she was not able to inspire such feelings. He kissed her hand—she trembled. Her uneasy air, her blushes, the fire that suddenly inflamed her eyes bore witness to the feeling that animated her soul. He embraced her and holding her in his arms he told her many times that he is enamoured of her. I do not know how he proved to her that he really meant what he said, but she showed that she was convinced and she finally lost her self-control. Whether this novelty attracted her greatly, or whether at this moment she felt overburdened by virtue, she did not even show any resistance, but

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surrendered quickly, more so than those women who are accustomed to amorous embraces.

"This example and others of the same kind convinced me that there are but few virtuous women who could not successfully be vanquished, and that there is nothing easier than to conquer a woman who never tasted the sweetness of love. But let us come back, Your Majesty, to the story of the two lovers.

Chapter VII

WHERE ONE WILL FIND MUCH TO DIS- APPROVE OF

ONE evening Zulma, on leaving Phenime, asked her when he might see her again. Though she feared his presence very much, she could not do without him. After having thought for a few moments she told him he might see her the next day.

“Phenime, who was aware of the danger of being all alone with Zulma, thought of inviting several guests, but on the day of the appointment with Zulma, she made it known that she would not receive anyone but him. She reflected that if someone else were present, Zulma would feel less liberty to speak to her of love;—and therefore his imagination would force him to show her his attention, and the world has open eyes. . . . And she knew Zulma so very well! Zulma was less dangerous to her when they were alone, for he knew how to be respectful, but in the persence of guests he was not prudent enough. Therefore, she thought it advisable to see

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him in company as infrequently as possible. In addition, he was always so sad when he could not speak with her! Was it not too cruel to rob him of the pleasure that she allowed him without taking any risk? All these reasons, Phenime thought, made her arrive at this conclusion and she yielded either to custom or to that which seemed most sensible. However, what she did was prompted by her love for Zulma.

"This very day she was extremely tempted to make his happy. She tried to persuade herself and to conquer in herself all that which opposed the culmination of her love. She exaggerated Zulma's constancy and his pressing desire to please her. She even recollected with pleasure that Zulma preferred to be betrayed than to be unfaithful. And then . . . Zulma was young, full of spirit, beautifully built, all such things she could not resist, but these were not the most important attributes that excited her desire."

"So what the devil stopped her from surrendering?" asked the Sultan, "This woman puts me out of patience!"

"Eight years of virtue," answered Amanzai, "Eight years of virtue and one single weakness would entirely dim its merit. . . ."

"Indeed! What people call merit," exclaimed the Sultan.

"For a thoughtful woman it is greater loss than

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Your Majesty thinks," answered Amanzai, "Virtue is always accomplished by profound peace. Virtue does not amuse, but gives satisfaction. A woman who fortunately possesses it is always satisfied and self contented. The esteem she shows to virtue is always held in respect by others and the pleasure that such a woman sacrifices is worth less than the pleasure that the sacrifice itself would procure."

"Tell me, please," asked the Sultan, "would I be virtuous if I were a woman?"

"I really do not know, Sire," answered Amanzai, stupefied by this question.

"It is unbelievable, Sire, that you could ask such a question," said the Sultana.

"I did not address you," answered the Sultan, "I want no one save Amanzai to answer me, would I be virtuous?"

"I think so," replied Amanzai.

"Well, my dear, you are mistaken," retorted Schah-Baham, "I would be quite the opposite. Now, that which I have just said," he added turning to the Sultana, "does not mean that I want you to dislike virtue. That was only my private opinion and it is quite possible that if I were a woman, I would change my view. In such matters everybody thinks as he likes, and I am not proposing to restrain anybody."

"Your lord is embarrassed," said the Sultana, smil-

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ing, to Amanzai, "He would be very much obliged to you if you would continue your story."

"Zulma came to see Phenime," continued Amanzai, "and though he came earlier than she expected him, she did not fail to tell him that he was late.

"'How happy I am, Phenime,' he said tenderly, 'that you find me guilty.'

"When Phenime realized the importance of the words she had just uttered, she wanted to apologize, but she did not know what to say. Zulma smiled, on account of her embarrassment, and she blushed because she saw him smiling. He fell on his knees and kissed her hand with extreme ardor; she made a movement as if to take her hand away, but when she saw he was making no effort to retain it, she held her hand quietly.

"In the meanwhile, Zulma spoke to her affectionately. She did not answer him, but she listened to him with such attention and eagerness, she would have reproached herself had she disturbed him in the slightest degree. Her breasts were a little uncovered, and when she saw that he fixed his eyes on them, she attempted to cover her partly exposed body.

"'O, you are cruel!' he said to her.

"This exclamation was sufficient to stop her hand. In order to enable him to enjoy the little favor she granted him, and yet to avoid any unpleasant con-

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clusions on his part, she pretended to arrange her head dress. Zulma's eyes could not be a long time fixed upon what Phenime abandoned to him without becoming inflamed. She took much delight in the fact that she was admired, her eyes became animated, she looked at Zulma languidly and seemed plunged in a most delightful dream.

"Go ahead, Zulma," encouraged the Sultan, "but he didn't see all that, the cruel heart," he added in disgust.

"In spite of the excitement with which Phenime was overwhelmed she noticed the ardor of her lover, and being afraid of his emotions as well as of her own, she rose suddenly. He made no effort to restrain her, but as he had no strength to speak he bedewed her hand with tears, to show her how much he was hurt by her cruel resolution. So much respect on his part brought her emotions to a climax, but she was not yet conquered by love and she triumphed both over her own and her lover's desires, which were, perhaps, more dangerous than her own.

"As soon as she had freed herself from his arms, she motioned him to rise. He obeyed. For some time they looked at each other silently. Finally Phenime told him she wanted to play. Improper as this wish seemed to Zulma, he could not resist her will and prepared a game with such zeal as if he himself desired to play. She was so deeply moved by this

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new proof of his submission, that I saw her ready to apologize for this fancy, which she soon found to be ridiculous. This repentance of Phenime was too short lived to make Zulma happy and the deeper she was moved, the more she tried to conceal her feelings. She started the game, but found it so annoying that she soon learned that what she contemplated, against Zulma had little foundation. But she did not want to admit that her sentiments toward Zulma caused her languor, and she attributed it rather to the kind of game they were playing and therefore, she urged her lover to choose another. He obeyed her, sighing, and she was not less tormented than he. The disorder that she wanted to calm, the amorous inclinations that she wanted to distract, seemed to grow more intense and engulfed her soul. As if in a dream, she thought she was interested in her game, but in fact, her mind was entirely occupied with Zulma.

“His melancholy air, his deep sighs, his ever ready tears, restrained only by his respect for her, moved Phenime deeply. Infused by the most tender emotions with which he inspired her, she contemplated him with all her heart. Finally, whether confused by the state of her mind in which she found herself, or whether unable to bear his gaze, she leaned her head against her hand. No sooner did Zulma see her in this attitude, than he fell to her feet. Phenime seemed

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not to see him. Either her mind was occupied, or she did not wish to disturb him. He took advantage of the moment of her weakness and kissed her free hand with more ecstasy than a lover who enjoys the utmost happiness. Showered with favors he did not yet dare hope for, he looked into her eyes to read his own lot. Phenime still had her face covered with her hand. He slowly regained his self-control; and Phenime displayed her face covered with tears. This spectacle affected Zulma so deeply that he breathed with a profound sigh.

“‘Oh, Phenime.’

“‘Ah, Zulma,’ she answered tenderly.

“After having uttered these words they looked at each other with such tenderness, with such fire, with such fondness and enchantment that only true love can feel.

“Zulma at last recovered his speech, and with a voice interrupted by sighs he said with ecstasy:

“‘Phenime, if it is true that you finally became moved by my love and that you still fear to tell this to me, allow your eyes at least, which I adore, to confide in me.’

“‘No, Zulma,’ she replied, ‘I love you and I would never forgive myself if I would diminish your deserved triumph. I love you, Zulma. My mouth, my heart, everything should tell you of my love and everything tell you. . . . Zulma, my dear Zulma.

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I am happy only from the moment I have revealed to you my ardent love.

"At these sweet and unexpected words, Zulma thought he would expire of joy. Weighted with happiness as he was at that moment, he did not forget that Phenime could make him still happier. Though he knew that Phenime's confession entitled him to a thousand other favors of which he could hardly dream, his respect for her made him control his desires, and he waited until she would decide his lot for him.

"Phenime, who knew Zulma so well, was not mistaken about the motives that made her lover suspend his ardor. She gazed at him with extreme softness and finally yielding to the sweet sentiments with which her heart was overflowing, she thrust herself upon him with such passion that the strongest terms could not describe and the most ardent imagination could not portray.

"What truth, what sentiment was in their ecstasy. No, my eyes never saw a more affecting spectacle. Both drunk with love, they seemed to have lost their senses. It was not the kind of a momentary emotion that desire gives, but it was an intense delirium, a sweet fury of love, so frequently sought, but so rarely sensed.

"O, my love! my love!" uttered Zulma every now and then.

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“Phenime, abandoned to her intensity, clasped him in her arms, gazed rapturously at him, fell upon him and exclaimed in exultation,

“‘Zulma . . . ah, Zulma, how late I learned what happiness is.’

“These words were followed by that delicious silence to which the soul gladly resigns itself, whenever it is unable to express in a more fitting way its innermost sentiments. Nevertheless, there still were many things for Zulma to desire. Phenime, whom Zulma’s ardour inspired with the same emotions, did not oppose, and yielded to them blindly. They were so avid for love that it even seemed that she could more easily satisfy his desires than her own. The more she defended herself against love, the more she proved to him how much her resistance had cost her. She rewarded him with satisfaction for the torments she had caused him for such a long time. She would have blushed to oppose him with a false decency that so frequently hinders and corrupts pleasure, and mixes love with repentance.

“The sweet and sincere Phenime would consider herself guilty should she lessen the extreme ardour with which Zulma inspired her. She anticipated all his caresses and just as a few moments ago she considered herself worthy because of the resistance she showed, so she now considered herself worthy because of the tenderness she lavished on Zulma. In

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one of their ecstatic intervals, short as they were, Zulma said,

“Phenime, judging by your passion and by the extreme sentimental affection that you display, you loved me long ago. Then why did you make your confession so late?”

“I desired you from the beginning,” answered Phenime, ‘but my reason opposed my sentiments. The more I felt this most passionate love, the more I feared to indulge it. Not knowing what love was I thought I would require more tenderness than I should be able to inspire. You are the one that proved to me that there are people still capable of love. I must admit that up to this time you have only moved me, but never conquered. This virtue of mine that I am sacrificing today with such delight, fought against you a long time. I always thought with despair, that one single weakness would bereave me of the respect I enjoyed, and of the happiness of being respected. O, Zulma,’ she added straining him in her arms, ‘how hideous are those moments when I did not show you my love. How could I have resisted? Zulma, I made you shed tears, but not tears of the kind that you shed now. Forgive me, my dear, I was then more unhappy than you were. Yes, Zulma, I will always reproach myself for thinking that to belong to you meant to forego many pleasurable objects I desired, that you would not be

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able to replace. You loved me and I thought of somebody else's respect how can I deserve yours?'

"Your Majesty can easily surmise," continued Amanzai, "what followed this conversation. Though this discourse gave me much pleasure, I can hardly recall the words of these two intoxicated lovers, who continuously interrogated each other, but allowed no time for answering their own questions; these disconnected ideas disclosed the disorder of their souls, which was not as charming to me as it was for themselves. I was surprised at the vivacity of their passion and of the satisfaction they found in it. It was already quite late when Zulma left and as soon as he did, Phenime, who offered him all of her time, seated herself to write him a letter.

"Zulma came to her the next day early in the morning, still more in love, still more passionately loved, to enjoy still more delicious moments at her feet, or in the arms of Phenime.

"In spite of my inclination to change my domicile frequently, I could not resist ascertaining whether they would love each other for a long time, and this curiosity kept me there for nearly a year. But as I saw that their love, far from becoming diminished, seemed to grow from day to day; that they added to their tenderness and their vivacious and most ardent passion, their mutual confidence and equally tender amity, I sped to other places to seek surcease or pleasure.

Chapter VIII

LEAVING Phenime, I entered a house, where everything was so ordinary that it was not worth a glance or a word. Therefore I did not remain there. For the next few days I could find nothing in any of the places where my restlessness and curiosity lead me, that amused or attracted me. In one locality, the inhabitants yielded to vanity; in another to caprice; here to interest; there to habit. I even saw indolence the sole motive of human weaknesses. Quite frequently I found people who worshipped vivid but passing emotions in the name of good taste. But I never found such love, such voluptuous tenderness, such affection, as I witnessed in the admirable case of Phenime and Zulma.

“Wearied of my errant life, and convinced that the sentiment which they were continuously trying to exhibit as fulfilled, was not of a sincere kind, I became annoyed by my destiny and began to earnestly desire the occasion that would bring my punishment to an end.

“‘What morals!’ I used to cry out. Now, Brahma who knew them well, buoyed me up with false hopes.

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How could he expect that the unbridled taste for pleasure that reigned in Agra; that the general contempt for decency would enable me to find the required two persons who would bring about my reincarnation? Entirely engaged in sorrowful reflections, I came to a house where everything seemed very peaceable. A spinster of about forty years, lived there alone. Though she was still attractive enough to be loved without being ridiculous, she was discreet, avoided noisy pleasure, and saw very few people. She seemed to prefer to associate with those who due to their age and inclinations sheltered her from suspicion; rather than to seek pleasanter company. And so there were very few homes in Agra more gloomy than hers.

“Among the men that used to visit her, was one whom she seemed to prefer. He was quite elderly, serious, cold, and reserved, due to his temperament rather than to the high office he held. He was a principal of a Brahmin college. He was austere, hated pleasure, and believed that no recreation existed that would not degrade the soul of a true sage. On account of his unpleasant disposition and gloomy exterior, I considered him as one of those persons who is more fierce than virtuous; inexorable to others, indulgent to themselves, and bitterly condemning publicly those vices that they themselves practice in secrecy. Finally I concluded that he was a bigot.

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Fatmés life made me detest people of a sage and staid appearance. Though I was rarely mistaken when I thought ill of such a type, I was wrong about Mocles; and when I learned to know him, I found that he deserved the highest praise. His character was straightforward and his virtue sincere. All of Agra considered him wiser than he desired to appear. Nobody doubted the sincerity of his aversion to pleasure; nobody doubted his adherence to his principles, austere as they were. Almaide (that was the name of the spinster with whom I lived) enjoyed an equally favorable opinion. The close association between her and Mocles did not give rise to any injurious suspicion malicious as public opinion was towards intimate friendships. Theirs was respected and was honored as based on mutual virtuous tastes.

“Mocles was wont to call upon Almaide every evening and whether they were with others or alone, their actions were irreproachable, their discourse wise and sedate. They usually discoursed on moral problems. During these discussions Mocles always displayed a brilliant mind and upright principles. Only one thing displeased me, that these two persons, who were superior to others in every way, who kept all their passions in strict bonds, that these two people could not triumph over their personal pride; he considered himself as a model of perfection. Frequently they did not content themselves with their mutual

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respect, but attempted to bestow upon themselves unlimited praise with great complacency, fervor and vanity that was contrary to their usual conduct. While this house saddened me greatly, I resolved to stay there for sometime longer. It was not because I hoped to find amusement or deliverance there. The more I believed them perfect enough to cause my deliverance, the less I dared to expect any weakness from them. Wearied of my ramblings, disenchanted with the world, feeling keenly the horror of my experiences, I was not sorry to witness moral discourses. I listened eagerly to their conversation, either because its novelty pleased me, or because I considered their discourse very salutary in my present condition.

"Oh, truly, I am not loathe to tell you what I am depressed by your moral discourse," said the Sultan, "Now I see where you acquired it. In order that you be not tempted to display your eloquence or your memory, I reiterate again my threats, that I so wisely made at the beginning of your story. Were I less clement I would let you continue; and the delight that you take in speaking would surely lead you far afield. But, I do not like hypocrisy, therefore, I am telling you again there is nothing less entertaining than morals."

"Though Almaide and Mocles were gifted with such rare virtue," resumed Amanzai, "they quite often

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mixed their moral discourses with too much detailed description of vice. No doubt their intentions were good, but they were not prudent enough to keep within the bounds of ideas that do not inflame the imagination, and thus avoid tempting their senses.

“Almaide and Mocles, who, not feeling any personal danger or believing themselves superior to others, were not afraid having sensual pleasure. It is true, that after having vividly described all its charms they did not hesitate to exaggerate all its shame and dangers. They even agreed that real happiness exists only in the very soul of virtue, and as they considered this view as a commonly accepted truth, they did not discuss it at length. The pitfalls of love were not disposed of so readily. They discussed this matter very carefully and dwelt upon its exciting details with so much confidence that they could hardly realize the danger that threatened them. At least a month passed in which they amused themselves every evening with these vivid descriptions which ill became their reputation. Regardless of any other discussions, they always returned to the one that they should have avoided. Mocles whose disposition gradually became kinder on account of these talks, used to visit Almaide more often; enjoyed the discourses more intensely; and used to leave her later than usual. Almaide on her part awaited him with greater impatience, saw him with keener pleasure, and listened

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to him with less distraction. When Mocles happened to come to her while she had guests, he felt constrained and embarrassed; and she herself experienced the same uneasiness. But when left alone they were consumed with such joy, as only two lovers can experience, who having been annoyed for a long time by tiresome company, can at last give themselves up to their own sentiments. Almaide and Mocles approached each other with eagerness, complained that they had no chance to be alone, and gazed at each other with extreme contentment. Finally their attitude became so familiar as to lead them to one result, especially since Almaide and Mocles did not realize that their new relationship was pregnant with certain consequences.

“One day Mocles praised Almaide’s virtue excessively.

“‘As for me it is not so singular that I have been prudent,’ she said, ‘In the case of women, prejudices are an aid to virtue; in the case of men, they corrupt the morals. (It is a form of foolishness when men are not gallant; and it is a vice when women are) You, for instance, who praise me so much, deserve more credit than I do.’

“‘Those who do not examine facts with clear understanding,’ he said gravely, ‘those would certainly imagine that I deserve more credit than you, but they



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would be wrong. A man can easily resist love, but it is quite different with women. If they do not yield to affection, they yield to their senses. For want of those emotions which cause so much disorder, they have their vanity which becomes a source of weakness, and that is not easy to overcome. But the most horrible thing for women,' Mocles added, sighing and raising his eyes heavenward, is their perpetual lack of occupation. This fatal leisure delivers their minds to the most dangerous ideas; imagination naturally vicious, overpowers them and renders them weak; passion already is still resistant, the phantom of voluptuousness exposes it to desire; a woman alone and abandoned to the vivaciousness of her imagination, follows a chimera to which this want of occupation gave birth. She turns away from her ideas of virtue. She thinks it is useless to resist anything that intrigues her. It is when she is alone that she weakens. But the heart fed with tenderness; the senses accustomed to voluptuousness; will they always be content with illusions. . . . Presuming that she doesn't seek anything that might injure her virtue, can she, however, flatter herself that at a certain moment when an affectionate, ardent and tender lover would fall on his knees, lament, sigh and shed tears; would she find sufficient resistance in her soft heart that would make her triumph over this dangerous situation?'

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“‘Oh, Mocles,’ exclaimed Almaide blushing, ‘how difficult it is to practice virtue.’

“‘You are less constituted than others to believe in virtue,’ he answered, ‘You, who are so graceful. Born to live in pleasure, you have sacrificed everything to this virtue, which others sacrifice for most worthless indulgences.’

“‘I do not boast of being so perfect,’ she answered modestly, ‘but I really fear the lack of occupation that you just mentioned, those books and pernicious images that weaken the soul.’

“‘Yes, I know it,’ he answered, ‘Your chastity you owe chiefly to your continuous round of interesting occupations, for nothing makes people greater slaves to their own passions than idleness. And if idleness is dangerous for men, who are born less fragile, mind you how dangerous it is for women.’

“‘It is true that we have much to combat,’ she said.

“‘Infinitely more than we think and that is what I have told you,’ he answered, ‘In addition to this you must consider that women are always first approached (with the exception of a few shameless ones, who without pride or principles, dare first offer their love) that it never happens that we must resist those attentions, those pleasures, and that obstinacy, that we employ daily against women with so much success.

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Besides if you add to the tributes which are rendered to them, the examples . . .

“In this regard,” she interrupted, “we have no advantage over you. The example itself ought to persuade a gallant like yourself.”

“That is not exactly true for all men,” he responded, “because there are many whose condition forbids this frenzy of the soul, which one calls the pleasure of love. I for instance belong to this class.”

“Even if that were not so, born fortunate enough to be inaccessible to passion, you would always be . . .”

“At these words Mocles lifted his eyes to heaven and sighed.

“‘What?’ continued Almaide, ‘you have reasons to reproach yourself? Oh, Mocles, if you are not satisfied with yourself, who then dares to be satisfied with himself?—What?—you wanted to know love?’

“‘Yes,’ he answered sadly, ‘This confession humiliates me, but it is true. It is also true that I did not yield to this fatal temptation. By confessing to you that I was sometimes obliged to fight, I appear to your eyes as being weak and your astonishment shows that you can hardly believe it. I have extricated myself from error; that is in my favour. It is less humiliating to be tempted than it is glorious to resist temptation. Because I have confessed to you that I am possessed by weakness, I am forced to tell you also about my triumphs. What I lost to you by my confession of

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weakness I want to regain by my triumph. I am afraid you will attribute to pride that which I have confessed from a mere desire to avoid a misunderstanding.' When he had finished this modest discourse, he lowered his eyes.

"'You do not risk my high opinion with your confession,' she said animatedly. I understand you very well. So you felt yourself tempted to succumb? I am not astonished at all. Constant reaching toward perfection is in vain; one can never attain it.'

"'What you just said is unfortunately true,' he answered.

"'Alas,' she exclaimed agitatedly, 'and can you imagine, Mocles, I have praised myself so much and boasted of being exempt from that weakness with which you reproach yourself.'

"'What? You too, Almaide?'

"'I trust you very much, therefore I will not conceal anything and will confide to you that I too had to struggle against my weakness. What surprised me always and what I cannot realize now, is that this emotion which overcomes our senses and troubles them, is within our control. The sensation overtook me many a time while I was engaged in most serious occupation, and when my heart should have been least accessible. Usually I struggled successfully, but occasionally I could not resist, and in spite of myself it enslaved me; it inflamed my imagination and on-

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quered all my faculties. I would not be surprised if this shameful emotion could subdue a heart that is delighted to be fed by it and to become its prey; but why does it haunt a heart that continuously takes the utmost care to destroy its susceptibility?

“Real chastity consists rather of triumphing over temptation than of avoiding it. There is little merit in being chaste unless there were serious obstacles to overcome in order to preserve this chastity. But since we are discussing this topic, will you please tell me this. As you are of an age in which your blood flows less impetuously, and you are less susceptible to desire, why do you still feel temptation?”

“‘I feel them less frequently,’ she replied, ‘but I still feel them.’

“‘The very same case with me,’ he answered with a sigh.

“‘It is madness of us to speak as we do,’ Almaide said blushing, ‘and this conversation does not become us at all.’

“‘I doubt whether we ought to be afraid of this conversation,’ answered Mocles with a slight smile, ‘It is reasonable of us to mistrust ourselves, but on the other hand it might create a wrong impression of our powers of susceptibility. I agree that the topic we are discussing leads necessarily to certain ideas, but it is rather essential to discuss such topics, in order to make them clear to ourselves and not to be

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misled by them. Besides, you must not believe that these subjects which are dangerous to people who live in turbulence, can make any impresson upon us. Those things by themselves are harmless. Virtuous and pure people are sometimes compelled to discuss them very carefully, but these discussions do not affect their innocence or their morals. To a corrupt heart everything looks vile and corrupt, and that which pleases the chaste does not produce any impression upon the vile.'

"'I believe what you say,' she answered, 'and I will not reproach myself, because you think I ought not to.'

"'You will never guess what I am curious about,' he said, 'I dare not tell you, for it would be indiscreet, but still I cannot resist asking you. I would like to know whether a proposal of a certain kind was ever made to you, and whether you have ever been willingly or unwillingly, obliged to experience a man's ecstasy?'

"Almaide, at this unforeseen question, became confused, blushed, seemed to lose herself in thought and finally, very much embarrassed, she said.

"'Yes, and as you want to know the truth, I will confess to you. One day a fair youth, in spite of my aversion to men, seemed to me very lovable. As he found me alone one day he told me many of those gallantries that men believe they must tell women who have not yet reached the happy age

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which inspires respect; or whom perhaps they find quite attractive enough to inspire their desires. We were alone. I responded to him according to my beliefs, but he seemed to be dissatisfied. He did not realize that I did not want him to triumph over me. He rather believed that by my resistance I wanted to render his victory more desirable. He even assured me that I loved him. You can easily imagine that I strove to enlighten him to the contrary. I do not know with what kind of women this giddy-headed young man had associated, but I am sure they were not accustomed to respectful attentions. He approached me, took me suddenly in his arms and threw me down on a divan. Please,—please, allow me to dispense with the rest of my story, for it wounds my modesty and troubles my senses. Be satisfied with —.’

“No,” interrupted Mocles, ‘you must tell me all. It makes me shudder to think that it is not the fear of your troubled senses or your injured modesty, that seals your lips. It is rather that you are ashamed to confess that you were too sensual. This motive, perhaps, is far from deserving praise, but on the other hand, it must not be blamed too much. And may I add, that if it is true that the telling immerses you in dangerous emotion, I assure you that you will be able to restrain it, if you really do not feel guilty. Don’t you want to know what ideas have power over you? How can you trust yourself without testing

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yourself? If you will not give your soul its liberty you will never know its power. Almaide, believe me, that one never escapes danger unless one is aware of it. The one who overestimates his powers is always susceptible to danger. You cannot rely upon the past circumstances of your experience. Only the effect produced upon you by relating it now, will be able to convince you how far you have advanced on the road to virtue. Moreover, it will show you, what there is left in you to be destroyed, in order to achieve such an aversion for pleasure that would render you perfectly immune.'

"This advice given by Mocles surprised me. I knew him to be a straightforward man and I could not understand what made him, at this moment, reason in a manner contrary to his principles. 'What,' said I to myself in astonishment, 'is it possible that Mocles, this sage Mocles, should wish to force upon Almaide those details that would injure her modesty and cause her corruption?' My desire to understand his motives caused me to look at him carefully, and I found in his eyes such charm that I began to hope to find deliverance in a place where I had never expected it.

"While I was cherishing this sweet hope caused both by my idea of Almaide's and Mocles's virtue, and by the troublesome emotions in which they were, Almaide continued her story.

Chapter IX

WHERE ONE WILL FIND A GREAT PROBLEM TO SOLVE

“**I** WILL obey you,’ Almaide said to Mocles, ‘You just made me feel that vanity is the only reason for my silence; and now I want to punish myself by imparting to you without disguise all the circumstances of my adventure, which mortified me so much. I told you already I think, that this young man threw me down upon the divan. I had hardly recovered from my astonishment when he in turn threw himself upon me. Although I could not express my anger because of the excess of my surprise, he nevertheless could read it easily enough in my eyes; and in order to take precautions against my outcries, he succeeded in spite of my resistance, in sealing my mouth with a most insolent kiss. I am not in a position to tell you how much this excited me, but I must confess that my indignation did not last long. Nature which betrayed me, soon moved me to the very depths of my being. My anger became appeased with his kisses. My senses were inflamed, an unknown fire

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flowed in my veins. I do not know what detestable pleasure it was that animated me, and filled my very soul to insensibility. My cries grew into sighs, and being overcharged with emotion, I could not resist him. Moaning over the deplorable state in which I found myself, I lost completely all my strength, which was so requisite as a means of defense.'

"'What a terrible situation,' Mocles said, 'Well, continue,' he added, looking at her with inflamed eyes.

"'And so,' she resumed, 'in so far as I was able I reproached him, but rather in a mechanical way. I think that I spoke to him and treated him with the contempt that he deserved. I say that I think, because I am not certain of it. The more this cruel difficulty of mine increased, the more the force of my fury abated. My ideas became peculiarly confused and yet I did not yield. I resisted, and though weakened, I spared no effort to repulse him. I can not recall all this without horror, and I feel ashamed as if I still lingered moaning, in his audacious arms. What a terrible moment for virtue. Oh, Mocles, although this man sought to rob me of my priceless innocence, overcome with troublesome emotion and fearful lest I lose my treasure, nevertheless I found much sweetness in the voluptuousness that possessed me. Why is it that those strong fears did not stifle my desire for the pleasure? Why did this passion conquer my virtue? I wanted to free myself from

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the fate that menaced me (and a task it was indeed, how much I suffered on account of it). While I cherished this idea, a very violent emotion suffused me and I strongly hoped that nothing would interrupt his conquest. My sentiments caused me to blush, but still I desired further caresses. I longed for I knew not what . . . The ardour that consumed me was painful, and began to fatigue my senses. Being so intoxicated I could not distinguish the reproachful voice of my heart that tried to save me from my downfall. Evidently my gallant cavalier noticed my waning resistance, and with a final thrust he— How can I describe it? The very memory of it makes me faint. Having been only engaged in defending myself against his incessant kisses, I did not take precautions against his more passionate embraces. This last caress awoke my fury, but alas, only for a moment. I immediately felt my disorder augmented. All my efforts to escape from him or to disturb him in the least, proved futile. Finally, lost in the most inexpressible langour and in a ravishment impossible to describe to you, I fell exhausted and motionless in the arms of this cruel man who offended me so brutally.'

"'What a situation,' cried out Mocles, 'How I fear the consequences.

"'They were not what you think,' answered Almaïde, 'In the very midst of the encounter, when I

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had nothing more to fear, I knew not why my enemy suddenly ceased his fierce manoeuvres. By some extraordinary miracle that I never could understand, when he seemed to be at the climax of his passion, the burning gaze in his eyes which I could not sustain, suddenly faded. A langour which pervaded his entire being replaced his former agitation. Trembling, he pressed me in his arms more tenderly, but less violently than before and became just as relaxed as I was (a just punishment for his offending me). At this moment I began to be relieved, and I was happy to enjoy the humiliation of my enemy. After having reflected upon his mortification and thanking Brahma for the protection he granted me, I suddenly arose. As my senses calmed down and my mind became clearer I began to realize my shame. Twenty times I opened my mouth in order to reproach the offender, but some secret confusion closed it, and after looking at him as indignantly as he deserved, I suddenly left the room.

“To tell the truth, I should rather not have told you all these details that cause me to blush. I would rather not have confessed the weakness which I so greatly feared. That was the only danger,’ she continued, ‘in which I ever found myself and which I always avoided, knowing its nature. And now after that experience, I am doubly careful not to precipitate a repetition.’

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“‘So you see how important it is to test one’s heart,’ said Mocles, ‘By the way, how do you feel now? Did your story have any effect on you? Did it cause you any fear?’

“‘Yes,’ she answered blushing, ‘my heart is now less tranquil than it was.’

“‘Is your heart so disturbed that you would be embarrassed, were a virile and daring man to enter?’

“‘Please don’t ask me this,’ she exclaimed, ‘That would be the most cruel misfortune that could befall me.’

“‘O, yes,’ he answered with distraction, ‘that is easily understood.’ He now seemed to become enveloped in deep thought. From time to time he looked at Almaide with a confused air, and with eyes full of desire and irresolution. Almaide’s confession of her amorous encounter encouraged him, but his inexperience did not help him take advantage of it. How to seduce Almaide was not his only thought. He was full of disturbed feelings, he reflected upon his position; then he was overcome by the idea of pleasure; he almost succumbed; and then he regained his self-control; now I saw him ready to admit temptation; then I saw him ready to escape it.

“While he was struggling, Almaide was also in a state as disturbed as his. The story that Mocles made her tell produced upon her an unexpected effect. Her animated eyes, her fevered cheeks, her interrupted

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sighs, her anxiety, her languidness, all these were symptoms of her excitement. I impatiently awaited the development of a situation in which two chaste people were so imprudently engaged. For a few moments I even feared that they would not realize the danger to which their self-confidence brought them; and that their virtuous hearts would stop them from any further proceedings which might enable me to claim Brahma's promise.

"Almaide's and Mocles's bearing gradually became less timid and more voluptuous. I could easily judge that they were less concerned about their eventual fall, than about their present predicament. Both of them were equally tempted, both of them seemed to have the same desire, and the same need. Such a situation would be less embarrassing for two people who have some knowledge of the world. But Almaide and Mocles were far from knowing the art of mutual help; they did not dare to entrust their feelings to each other, which were conspicuous by their inflamed and glowing eyes. They would not even confess to each other to what extent they both were seduced. What a humiliation for the one who would first make the confession, if he would find in the heart of the other a remainder of virtue? How could the veil be torn from this unhappy situation? Even if Almaide were weaker than Mocles, we could not expect her to interrupt the silence. The virtue that

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she professed, her modesty and the decency of her sex, did not permit her to flaunt her desires. Though many women violate this law, Almaide could not. Still a novice in the art of loving, and little accustomed to coquetry, she was afraid of the contempt that might result from such an admission. Besides, could she know how Mocles would receive it?

"After some troublesome reflections on how to express his desires without being exposed to shame in case of failure, Mocles, who also could not confess his sentiments, believed he would be more successful if he would use sophistry. He would at least thus escape the shame of his efforts, should they prove unsuccessful."

"Oh my Lord!" said the Sultan, "so much reflection."

"But I do not see why you are astonished at so much reflection," said the Sultana, "I think that the situation required some thought."

"Some meditation is essential," replied Schah-Baham, "precisely what is required, but not quite so much. Those people who were so strongly tempted should not have wasted so much time in cogitation."

"You are wrong," said the Sultana.

"I'm wrong! What do you mean by that? I never heard such disrespectful speech; do not think there is any Sultan in the world who would tolerate it."

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"I did not mean that," answered the Sultana, "I meant to say that all the rebellious ideas of Almaide and Mocles succeeded each other in extreme rapidity. It is Amanzai's fault in spending a quarter of an hour in the telling of that which happened in two moments."

"If that is the case, then the story teller is a fool for wasting so much time in description, on thoughts which transpired so quickly," ruled the Sultan readily.

"You will oblige us," the Sultana said, "if your descriptions are more direct."

"I will try my best," answered Amanzai, "Should I find anything that is indirect, I will take care to omit it."

"The ideas that absorbed Mocles, his desires, his efforts to suppress them, and the pleasure with which he cherished them, gave him such a serious air that Almaide thought it time to question him on his long silence.

"'I fear,' she said, 'that some obscure ideas invade you.'

"'You are right,' he answered, 'the story that you just related has caused them.'

"Almaide seemed to be astonished. 'Ah, Mocles,' she cried out, 'and why?'

"'Because instead of calming the doubts that tormented me, you have aggravated and augmented

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them; because you can not answer all the questions I desire to put to you, and because it would be dangerous to interrogate you. My curiosity is aroused on certain points that are very strange to a man of my character and profession; and only a person who knows me as perfectly as you do, would not attribute it to base motives.'

"'I am certain,' she assured him, 'that you may tell me anything without being misunderstood.'

"'So be it,' he answered, 'If I had heretofore been sure of your friendship and of the confidence that you have in my discretion, the tale that you just entrusted me with, would convince me of it.'

"'Let us always know what occupies each other's mind,' she answered, 'Perhaps through reasoning we will finally come to an end of this'

"'Oh, no,' he interrupted, 'one cannot indulge in conjectures, that which troubles me requires the utmost certainty. Not to prolong this torture, I will tell you what I mean. You are to judge whether I can be indifferent, knowing as little as I do about such a vital matter. Besides, your interest must be closely interwoven with mine, because it is impossible that a person as virtuous as you are, should not be tormented by the same thoughts as I am.'

"'You frighten me,' she cried, 'Speak, I beseech you.'

"'Very well,' he answered, 'I believe that we do

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not deserve any credit for eluding certain experiences.'

"'Perhaps,' she said with an attentive air, as the conversation became more serious.

"'There is no doubt about it,' he answered, 'and I will convince you of it. You never experienced the sweetness of love. I always avoided it, is that sufficient reason to consider ourselves perfect? But you will surely say that we have desires, and that we triumph over them! Do you call this a victory? Do you know what a desire is? No! Our self-confidence betrays us; that which we considered as the most ardent of desires is nothing but ordinary temptation. It is true that we are prone to exaggerate our triumphs and our victories in order to sustain our moral self-esteem. We flatter ourselves that we are virtuous, while we are even less perfect than those whom we dare blame; and our vanity is an additional vice that those others are not guilty of.'

"'That is true,' said Almaide, 'that occurs to me. too.'

"'It is not only since today that this idea torments me,' he said with a sad air, 'I see only one way in which to rid myself of my doubt. Simple as it might prove to be, it is not dangerous.'

"'I find myself precisely in that very situation,' she said, 'and I am so much interested in your solution.'

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“‘One must know you as well as I do to be unafraid to tell you,’ he said, ‘Both you and I consider ourselves virtuous and, as I just told you, we do not know what virtue is. It consists of depriving ourselves of those acts that might appease our senses. And who can know what appeases the senses? Only he who enjoyed them fully. Only the enjoyment of pleasure can give us an idea of the cost of abstinence. Therefore, one who did not experience sin, cannot know what virtue is. So what can be sacrifice? Nothing . . . An idle fancy, for, what other name would you give to a desire that has never been consummated? And as the glory of triumph is the result of renunciation, what is due us who sacrifice only an abstract idea? But he who gives himself up to pleasure and then renounces it, he sacrifices himself . . . that is the great, the only, and the real virtue, that neither you nor I possess.’

“‘I see it absolutely, clearly,’ said Almaide, ‘I am sure we have nothing to boast of.’

“‘Nevertheless, we do boast,’ quickly answered Mocles, who feared Almaide might soon realize the falseness of his reasoning, ‘we boast and therefore we are guilty of pride. I sincerely praise you, because you understand that unless you can distinguish virtue from vice, one has a false idea about both. Moreover, we are continuously tormented by a desire to learn that which we obstinately want to ignore. The

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soul that is disturbed by curiosity neglects its duties. Being the prey of frequent *distractions* it loses the faculty of reasoning clearly. Detailing and searching all her perceptions she even loses time that could be used in practicing virtue. In order to be certain that we possess virtue, we must, consequently, become acquainted with vice.'

"For a few moments this reasoning confused her, but the new desire she felt to plunge into the suggested experiment, caused her more surprise than fright.

"'So you think that this would make us more perfect?' she asked in a trembling voice.

"'Certainly,' he answered with conviction, 'there is no doubt about it. Consider only our present position, and tell me whether it could be any worse.'

"'I can see it too well,' she said, 'there could really be nothing more forbidding.'

"'First of all,' he continued, 'we do not know whether we are virtuous,—a very sad situation for people who think as we do. This doubt, cruel as it is, is not the only misfortune that complicates our situation. It is more than certain, satisfied as we are with the privation we force upon ourselves, that there are thousands of more vital things that we believe we are exempt from observing. Consequently, because of the shadow of virtue, which perhaps may only be imaginary, we committed real crimes or

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(not being as important, yet it is remarkably inconvenient) we neglected to do good actions. Assuming we really are what we believe ourselves to be, I nevertheless mistrust the virtue we have chosen and I do not think it of sufficient merit to possess.'

" 'I understand you' she said sighing, 'O! what scruples you awake in me,' she continued, 'and the most terrible thought is that there is only one method of getting rid of them, and this method gives birth to new scruples.'

" 'This method,' he answered, 'is really less to be feared than you imagine. I presume that we both want to become acquainted with pleasure, so that we may ourselves judge whether it is really as charming as it is reputed to be. I must admit that for weak souls such a test would be very risky; but it seems to me, without any presumption, that we may trust ourselves. If this pleasure is less seductive than it is said to be, it will not be worth depriving ourselves of it; the privation will not entail sacrifice. If, on the contrary, this pleasure fills the heart with ecstasy, as people vouch, we will renounce it with so much more joy, when we know that we give it up for the sake of virtue.'

"This reasoning, which Almaide would have scorned had she been herself, had more effect on her soul than Mocles expected. After looking at him

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for an instant with uncertain and troubled eyes, she said:

“I feel, as you do, the absolute necessity of making this test, but with whom could I do it safely?”

“At these words she leaned languidly toward Mocles, who little by little came closer to her, until she found herself in his arms.

“I think,’ he said, ‘that if we wish to make this venture, we can do it between ourselves. We trust each other. Then too, we are doing it for the sake of that virtue which seems to be offended. I am sure that our curiosity, for which our good principles are responsible, will not become a habit. To whatever conclusions we will arrive, we will only gain, for our fall will at least secure us against our pride.’

“Though Almaide did not answer, she still seemed to hesitate. Mocles, who wanted to conquer her at any price, proposed to her, that they proceed in the test step by step, for they might find in the first stage of their experience enough proofs to overcome their doubts. She agreed, and they immediately started the game. They irritated their desires in an unskillful and clumsy way which nevertheless pleased their senses. They then lost themselves in the final voluptuous act. Whether they found in it little or much satisfaction, they continued it, or perhaps they could not stop and”

“And I presume you immediately were delivered

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and turned into something else?" interrupted the Sultan.

"No, Sire," answered Amanzai.

"Decidedly strange!" murmured Schah-Baham profoundly, "It is incomprehensible. Evidently they did not possess the qualities your Brahma required to deliver you."

"I thought they did, Your Invincible Majesty," answered Amanzai, "But apparently at least one of them missed what was so important for my liberty."

"I imagine that you must have been very angry," commented the Sultan, "and tell me, please, whom did you suspect?"

"Because of her story, I suspected Almaide; and even the extreme ignorance she displayed in yielding to Mocles could not alter my views. I was certain that when she related the story of her adventure, she did not disclose certain important details and those hindered my release from my prison."

"O, women, women!" exclaimed the Sultan, "Your reflection was perfectly right. I can wager that she did not confess everything, and that she prevented your deliverance."

"Impossible as it seems, the problem was more difficult. Mocles who, until now, enjoyed an irreproachable reputation, displayed a great deal of experience."

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"That changes the premise," decided the Sultan, "for Ah, yes, I can see it, . . . it was he."

"But come to an agreement," said the Sultana, "it was she . . . it was he. Why not admit that both were dishonest?"

"You are right," said the Sultan, "it is quite possible. But it seems to me that I would be more pleased if only one of them were guilty. I don't know why, but it would please me more. Continue, Amanzai."

"Mocles was the first who regained consciousness. He seemed to be astonished to find himself in Almaide's arms, and when his reason regained clarity, horror succeeded his astonishment. He did not seem to understand his position; he was full of doubts; he wanted to believe it was only a cruel dream. As soon as he made sure of his misfortune, he painfully recollected all he did to seduce Almaide; the criminal passion he displayed; all the art he applied to corrupt her. Gradually he sank into the most bitter despair.

"Soon Almaide opened her eyes. She looked rather confused than afflicted. Whether the despair in which she saw Mocles made her feel her misery, or her own state made her conscious of it, she cried out, and tears flowed.

"Ah, Mocles, you have seduced me!"

"Mocles admitted it; he accused himself of seducing her; he pitied her; he tried to console her; he spoke to her only as a man who really felt his humil-

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iation, on account of his over confidence. After having told her all that could inspire the most sincere repentance, he, without glancing at her, left her forever.

"Almaide, finding herself alone, was very much ashamed and could not regain her composure. She spent the whole night in weeping and reproaching herself for everything that happened. The next day Mocles went into the most restricted seclusion.

"I finally infer," interrupted the Sultan, "that it was not he who was guilty."

"And Almaide," continued Amanzai, "not being able to find any consolation, a few days later followed his example."

"This confuses me," cried the Sultan, "What you just said means that it was not she. My mind never had a more difficult problem to solve. I will leave it to those who are able to do it."

Chapter X

WHERE, AMONG OTHER THINGS, ONE
WILL FIND A MEANS OF KILLING TIME

BECAUSE of my strong moral sense I became annoyed with Almaide, since Mocles seduced her. The next day I left her, satisfied that there are at least two unfeeling women in Agra. Happily, my patience had saved me from entertaining a false idea."

"After leaving Almaide, I wandered about for a long time. Vice of this kind did not promise any more diversion, and I decided to avoid houses that have a decent and orderly appearance. My travels brought me to the outskirts of Agra, which were full of beautifully ornamented homes. The domicile in which I decided to reside belonged to a young gentleman, who did not live there, but who occasionally used to visit these quarters incognito.

"The evening after I had established myself, I noticed a lady arrive in a mysterious fashion. On account of her magnificent carriage and noble air, I presumed that she was a lady of the highest rank.

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Her beauty dazzled my eyes. Possessed of more splendor than Phenime, she was as modest as the latter. Her face was so gentle that I could not look at her without being conscious of the strongest emotions aroused within me. Judging from the manner in which she entered the room it seemed that she was astonished to find herself there. She trembled as she spoke to the slaves, who guided her in, and without raising her eyes she dreamily sank down upon the sofa. She seemed so languid that I could easily divine the emotions that troubled her.

“As soon as she was left alone, she gave herself up to the saddest reflections; she sighed a few times, and from her beautiful eyes, tears began to flow copiously. But her sorrow seemed of the tenderest sort, and was easily the result of doubt rather than of unhappiness. No sooner had she dried her eyes than a handsome young man entered impetuously. His presence troubled the lady. She blushed. Averting her eyes and covering her face, she endeavored to conceal her confusion. He approached her with more gallantry than tenderness and falling on his knees, he said:

“‘Ah, Zephis! Are my eyes mistaken? Is it you, Zephis, whom I see? Is it you whom I adore so much, and whom I dared not hope to find here? Is it you whom I hold in my arms?’”

“‘Yes,’ she said with a sigh, ‘it is I, who should not

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have come; it is I who am dying for shame and fear because I find myself in this house.'

"'How you endear my solitude,' he said kissing her hand.

"'Ah, I am sure I will regret it in the future. The proofs of my weakness will some day become more evident to me; while you will forget, as I am sure you will . . . And, if you ever recall this moment, Mazulhim, it will be only to despise me for what I have done for you.'

"'But you are mistaken,' he assured her. 'How can you, beautiful as you are, how can you entertain such chimeras? Do you know that I have never loved any one as tenderly as I do you? And you doubt my sentiments!'

"'No, unfortunately I have no doubts,' she answered sadly, 'I know that you are neither constant nor faithful. I even doubt whether you are capable of love. Nevertheless I adore you. I am conscious of my weakness; I pity myself, I can foresee all that I have to fear, but my love makes me face it bravely.'

"'But, truly, do you know,' he answered, 'that you do me mortal wrong by doubting my most tender feelings for you?'

"'Ah, Mazulhim,' she cried out, 'is that how you receive my sacrifice; is that how you encourage my heart? I love you, Mazulhim. If you knew me better, you would not doubt it. The heart that

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adores you, always belonged to you. Assure me that you always want it to belong to you. If you knew how much I desire to believe that you love me, you would not refuse to declare it to me. Do so—, at least out of consideration for me. My heart is only attached to you; to see you, to love you always, is my only and strongest wish. Is it possible that you are incapable of feeling for me as I feel for you?’

“‘Ah,’ he breathed, ‘I solemnly declare that’

“‘Mazulhim,’ she interrupted, ‘leave it to me to justify you. I shall do it better than you will, and I must believe that you love me better than you can show it.’

“‘Let me confess, my lady,’ he answered more seriously than tenderly, ‘that I feel quite unhappy that the proofs of my affection during the last six months, have not convinced you. I am aware that extreme passion such as I have inspired in you, is always tinted with some mistrust. If this would only harm me,’ he added holding her more closely, ‘I would not complain. The joy on seeing you, would make me forget how unjust you are, but it is your serenity in which I am so much concerned. If you understood my sentiments better, you would easily understand that your peace of mind is very much dearer to me than my own.’

“After having finished these words he wished to make the most tender liberties with Zephis, but she

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defended herself with such earnestness, that he was convinced of her sincerity. He desisted, and looked at her with astonishment.

“‘What, Zephis,’ he said to her, ‘Is that how you are proving your affection for me? Ought I receive such indifference?’

“‘Mazulhim,’ she answered weeping, ‘listen to me, please. I did not come here without knowing to what I exposed myself, and you would see me shedding less tears were I not ready to yield to your affection. I love you, and were it not that I am so moved, I would already be in your arms. But it is not yet too late, Mazulhim. We have not yet gone so far that you need conceal your real sentiments. You can still tell me, that you do not love me. This confession will be a terrible blow, but I should rather hear it now. Imagine how much more miserable my life would be, if you would make this confession after I have fulfilled your desires. Dominated by the wish to please, accustomed to inconstancy by the success of your many conquests, you seek only another victory, but not love. Do you deny perhaps that there is no passion in your desire for me? Examine your heart well! You are the lord of my destiny, and I do not deserve that you render me unhappy. If it is not the most unselfish love that attracts you to me, in other words, if you do not love me as much as I love you, do not be afraid to con-

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fess it to me. I would not blush were I to become the reward of love, but I would die of shame if I should be the object of caprice.'

"Although Zephis's words and tears failed to soften Mazulhim nevertheless he assumed an air less indifferent than before.

"'How your words disturb me,' he said to her, 'but I deserve them so little. Is it possible that you imagine that I mistake you for those despicable women with whom I was until this day associated? I must confess that my past life would give you cause to suspect me, but, Zephis, it is true that I feared love. And in order to avoid it, could I do any better than live with women without morals or principles; who, in the very moment when they seduced me with their charm, saved me with their character from the danger of love? You say I am accustomed to inconstancy by constant success. Do you esteem me so little, as to believe that I was proud of my previous victories, after I had seen you? Not one of those achievements which, according to your opinion, made me so proud, has given me one happy moment; and I would rather sacrifice my life, than win any victory that might make me less worthy of you.'

"Zephis seemed to be somewhat comforted by these words. She gave her hand to Mazulhim, fixing on him her beautiful eyes with such a tender and

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touching expression, that could be inspired by love only.

“‘Yes, Zephis,’ Mazulhim continued, ‘I love you very dearly. How happy I am to realize here at your feet, that even the most ardent transports I lavished until now, were not caused by love. How happy I am to learn it through you. Were it not for your charms, and even your virtue, I would never know this sweet feeling of love which I always avoided. I owe it to you and I wish to be forever suffused with adoration for you.’

“‘Ah, Mazulhim,’ she exclaimed, ‘how happy we would be if you meant what you say. If it is true that you love me now, will you love me always?’

“At these words she bent over him and holding him tenderly in her arms, she leaned her head against his. The most tender intoxication filled her eyes, and soon Mazulhim impregnated her soul with ecstasy. Oh God, what eyes she had, when she no longer doubted him. Though she was prepared to make Mazulhim the most happy lover in the world, she could not, in view of her former fears and virtue, see him so close to his happiness.

“‘You do not doubt that I adore you,’ she said, showing him but little resistance, ‘but could not you . . . ?’

“‘Ah, Zephis, Zephis,’ he interrupted, ‘can you still hesitate to prove to me your love?’

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"Zephis sighed and did not respond. More overcome by her own love, than convinced of that of her lover she finally yielded to his advances. O, happy Mazulhim! What charms were displayed before his eyes, and how their value was enhanced by her modesty! Mazulhim seemed to be strongly affected by them. Everything astonished him, everything in Zephis was the object of his praises and caress. Though far from condemning the admiration in which he was plunged, and which I myself shared, it seemed to me that in view of the situation in which he now found himself it was lasting too long, and the ultimate desire was in danger of being forgotten.

"It is true that the more delicate one is, the more time he spends on trifles. Only sentiment invents those tender digressions, only sentiment knows how to vary them incessantly, but they cannot be continued indefinitely. When they are stopped it is not in order to restrain the desire, but to find a new source of intoxication. For a while I believed Mazulhim to be inexhaustible, and Zephis's charms justified this idea. But I soon became astounded that the transports of this ardent and tender lover so anxious to be happy were growing weaker, in porportion to the charms he saw to strengthen them. He was lively, but not ardent; he praised, he admired

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incessantly; but does a lover express his desire only by praises and verbal admiration?

"In spite of the cleverness with which he tried to dissimulate his condition, Zephis noticed what little success her charms had. She seemed to be neither surprised nor shocked, but turned her beautiful eyes toward her lover.

"‘Get up,’ she said with the sweetest smile, ‘I am more happy than I thought I could be.’

"Mazulhim, offended by this remark, made another effort to convince Zephis that he did not deserve the opinion that she seemed to have about him, but in vain. Being at last forced to admit his impotence, he said in a tone that made me laugh,

"‘Alas! madam, it is you that makes me sad.’

"‘Your sadness amuses me, but your affliction offends me. It would have been too cruel if you had believed that you wounded my heart . . .’

"‘Ah! Zephis,’ interrupted Mazulhim, ‘how terrible it is to have wronged you and how difficult it is to justify myself.’

"‘Do not add to your afflictions,’ Zephis answered tenderly, ‘I believed that you loved me, and I am now convinced of it. You could not better prove your tenderness for me, than by your reproaches.’

"‘Ah! that may be good conversation,’ said the Sultan, “but in her heart this lady was surely not con-

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tent. First of all, such an experience is by its nature afflicting; and that which afflicts all women cannot divert one unless you will admit that the lady in question was quite capricious. Besides sentiment is not sufficient when such an accident happens. By the way, I remember that one day, I was quite young then, there was a woman . . . I will not tell you how it happened, but we were all alone . . . Really, I never mistrusted myself and all of a sudden . . . I don't know how to say it. Well, I told her the most gallant thing in the world, but it was in vain. The more I talked the more she wept. I witnessed it only once in my life, but it really was very touching. I told her, however, among other things that there was no reason for despair, that I did not do it purposely. . . .”

“Finish your cruel tale,’ interrupted the Sultana, turning to Amanzai.

“I see that I am not permitted to tell a story in my own home,” answered Schah-Baham. “From that I gather that there is no woman who does not derive some pleasure from such an incident. Consequently Mazulhim’s mistress who was giving vent to such pretty sentiments . . . would rather not have said them.”

“But you must know,” curtly said the Sultana, “that what you think afflicts a woman, merely embarrasses her.”

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"Oh! yes," answered the Sultan, "I for example, would not . . . don't be afraid! Continue, Emir."

"Confused as Mazulhim seemed to be because of his adventure, I thought that he was rather astonished at Zephis reaction.

"If anything could console me for this terrible disgrace, I want to be assured by you that it does not affect your well-being,' he said. 'How women would detest me if they would have the same causes for complaint against me.'

"I must confess,' she answered, 'that I would react the same way were I to ascribe this accident to your coldness. But as you told me, that love alone has troubled your senses, therefore, I find that this adventure is a thousand times more flattering to me than all your transports. I adore you too much to believe that you do not love me. It is quite possible that I am too vain, and therefore I believe that this accident happened through my fault,' she said with a smile, 'but whatever may be the reason for my indulgence, I only know one thing and that is, I forgive you. Finally I want to tell you that your unfaithfulness would make me more unhappy than that which just happened. Yes, Mazulhim, be faithful to me and I hope that I shall always find you the same as now. All that I missed for lack of the final consummation I have gained by the certainty of your everlasting faithfulness.'

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"While Zephis spoke, Mazulhim, who would rather have seen her less obliging, did not spare any efforts that might yet avert his defeat. Zephis willingly complied with his advances, of which he, in his heart, did not approve, for her compliance made his impotency less and less excusable. Her efforts to please became even more affectionate and unrestrained. Zephis did not defend herself, she granted him her utmost favors; her eyes sparkled with an unusual fire; it seemed as if she would only now really yield to him. Until this moment, she was passive to his eagerness, now she shared it with him. The repugnance so inseparable from the first moment, which so many women experience, gave way to active enjoyment. Zephis bore without embarrassment Mazulhim's praises and she even seemed to encourage new ones; she blushed, but, not due to modesty. The pity Mazulhim inspired her with seemed to have no end, nevertheless"

"Ah! yes," interrupted the Sultan, "nevertheless "I understand it well, what an impertinent man! I do not know anything that could be more unbearable than his behavior towards Zephis. I am quite sure that she became angered."

"And I," said the Sultana, "am of a different opinion. To be angry because of such a misfortune is to deserve it."

"Well," answered the Sultan, "do you really think

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that all women reflect in like manner? What I am sure of is, that I would be very angry in a similar case, and yet I would not consider myself unreasonable. But let us hear what Zephis said, for as I can see it, in such matters, each one to his own taste."

"As indulgent as she was," Amanzai took up the thread of narrative, "she seemed to be annoyed by the obstinate misfortune of her lover. Whether she was now more susceptible than before, and therefore less patient of his lack of power, or whether she was more favorably disposed, at any rate, she now had less strength to bear it.

"Mazulhim less convinced of his defeat than Zephis, or perhaps more accustomed to similar situations, had not such consideration for Zephis, and made another attempt to do, what sound judgment would have deemed unwise. It seemed to me that she disliked his new efforts, less from Mazulhim's audacity, than from the insult he dared offer to her charms.

"In spite of her predicament, she smiled in a way which seemed to tell him that she was not the kind of person with whom such methods could be employed with happy results. However, he was punished soon enough. She yielded to his ridiculous attempts with an intrepidity which all women have longed vainly to possess in such cases, and which is not always crowned with success. Though Mazulhim had now

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less reason to complain, nevertheless he was not in a very happy situation, and in spite of his efforts, Zephis had no reasons to fear the effect of his ambitions. Mazulhim's astonishment made me believe that were he responsible for his condition he could not have found many women, who, like Zephis, would have permitted him such varied opportunities. What I just said, however, was meant without offense to any one, for how can one know whom to blame? Be it as it may, Mazulhim's surprise was so conspicuous that at the expense of many other women he praised Zephis, and this amused her so much that she could not help laughing.

"‘If you had asked me,’ she said to him, ‘I would have told you the result, but perhaps you would not have believed me.’

"‘I would surely be wrong,’ he answered, ‘but I should not have expected it. Years of successful experience, made me believe myself always capable of consummating that which I vainly tried to accomplish with you. Ah! Zephis,’ he sighed, ‘must I find in my increased desires, new reasons for complaint?’

"‘Indeed,’ she answered laughing, ‘understand how unhappy you are, and you may be quite sure of my pity.’

"‘Zephis!’ he pleaded with genuine feeling, ‘nothing can equal my affection, but your charms. Every

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moment increases my ardour and my despair, and I feel . . .”

“‘Oh! Mazulhim!’ she interrupted, ‘what is it in this happiness of yours that you regret? If it is true that you love me, you should not complain. One look of mine should make you more happy than all the pleasures that you seek, and even if you would have gratified them with others.’

“‘Your sentiments charm and penetrate me,’ he answered, ‘but as my love grows, my regrets and misery increase.’

“‘Let us finish this conversation,’ Zephis said on rising.

“‘What,’ he exclaimed, ‘you want to leave me? Ah! Zephis, do not abandon me, please, to the horror of my situation.’

“‘No, I will not, Mazulhim,’ she answered, ‘I have promised to spend the day with you, but let us leave this room. Let us go out and enjoy the fresh air and divert your imagination from all that saddens it. Mazulhim, the more one searches for pleasure, the less one tastes it. Let us try by escaping it, to improve our chance to grasp it.’

“The generous Zephis left the room, on finishing these words, and Mazulhim gave her his hand in the most respectful way. It is very surprising that Mazulhim, who made such bad use of all of his encounters, was the most sought after man in Agra.

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There was not a single lady who had not possessed him, or did not want to possess him as a lover. He was full of life, amiable, indiscreet, faithless, although he had a way of being faithless. All women knew it and nevertheless they tried to please him. His reputation finally became astonishing. They believed that he . . . , but what did they not believe? And how wasn't he obligated to their discretion? He, who had nothing to offer and who paid them so little?

"After an hour of promenade, Zephis and he came back from the garden. I looked into their eyes to see whether they were now more contented than when they left. Judging by the modest air of Mazulhim, I came to the conclusion that they were not; and I was right. Zephis seated herself carelessly on the divan and Mazulhim placed himself at her feet on a cushion. Having little to tell her, and not being able to entertain her in any way, he fell into contemplating her. A short while after, being ashamed of the disgraceful way he played with the most beautiful woman of Agra; still thinking of his misfortune, trembling, ardently desiring to overcome it, he did not know how to proceed. He was finally afraid that Zephis would consider his silence and coldness as proofs of indifference, rather than of fear and repentance. Suddenly he took her violently into his arms. He kissed her with such tenderness

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that it seemed he wanted to extricate himself immediately from the lethargy in which he was immersed. Zephis deliberated whether she was to subdue Mazulhim's new endeavors. His tenderness urged her to do it, but on the other hand the same tenderness showed her that this would be far more cruel than to refuse him anything. Did he really desire to be satisfied? Or did he know her so little that he thought she would be hurt if he would not try to become satisfied? Finally, was it his love or his vanity that made him so tender?

"While Zephis was occupied with these thoughts, Mazulhim, either wishing to withdraw from an annoying situation, or, as he was adept in the minute details of love, wanted to prevent Zephis from becoming wearied, thought he ought to employ all those little charms that proceed or follow a serious conversation, but cannot take the place of love. Zephis first refused to approve of this conduct; but considering his extreme eagerness with which he asked for her tolerance, she consented out of pure generosity, and shrugging her shoulders because of his ambition and because, to do her justice, she expected much less than he did.

"The inattentive and annoyed air which she kept for quite a long time, far from putting Mazulhim out of patience made him rather double his efforts, and as he was a man of the world who knew how to man-

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age little things, he forced her to pay him some attention, and then he gained her interest. The scant reality which he offered her unconsciously disappeared from her eyes. She shared with him the joy of the illusion and she became aware what a source of pleasure the imagination affords, and how limited nature would be without it. To complete their happiness, which he considered rather as a compensation that he owed Zephis, than a relief to himself, left a more vital impression on him than he had expected. Zephis charms, more and more touching, made him feel the emotion which he had so vainly sought and in the sweet disorder which began to overwhelm his senses, losing the recollection of his ill-fortune, or being incited by it more than depressed, he finally gloriously overcame all the cruel obstacles by which he was so long and so cruelly hindered.

"I understand," said the Sultan, "that was good—better late than never, that is to say . . ."

"Please do not explain further to us," interrupted the Sultana. "Don't you suppose Almanzai to be sufficiently prudent and delicate to leave something to the imagination?"

"I don't know anything about it," answered the Sultan, "it is not my affair, but after all, you know just as well as I do that Mazulhim was subject to accidents, and I think one ought to learn something

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about it, for if one incidentally could . . . Well, tell me a little more about Mazulhim."

"Sire, he was happy, but he knew better how to offend, than how to mend an outrage, and had he an affair with a woman less generous than Zephis, I doubt whether he would have been so easily pardoned. Though vain as he was of his love for Zephis, it seemed to me that he felt less the happiness of possessing her, than the pleasure of having proved his manhood. They commenced a tender conversation into which Zephis put much genuine sentiment, and Mazulhim used a great deal of jargon.

"A short time later supper was served, in which Mazulhim displayed much daintiness and taste. Zephis, more and more animated by the presence of her lover, made him a thousand passionate declarations, that caused me to admire her mind and her tenderness. Though he himself was so astonished with all those charms, he was much less moved by them than I, and it seemed to me that his vanity was more flattered by his victory over Zephis, than his heart was touched by the strong and delicate passion which she displayed in spite of her fears of his inconstancy.

"If the possessing of Zephis did not make Mazulhim as amorous as she deserved, he became nevertheless, more spirited. His heart incapable of sentiment still languished. All Zephis's virtues that the un-

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grateful Mazulhim praised without believing in them, were far from attaching him to her, and rather seemed to alienate and constrain him. I did not even see him moved by her tender and true love, but she began to inspire him again with desires. He looked at her with excitement, he sighed, he spoke to her with ardour about the happiness that he enjoyed and seemed impatiently to await the end of the repast.

"He even confided that to her, but whether she was amused or, that she did not have the same certainty as to what would happen after supper, she was less impatient. She loved him, however. He urged her, and soon . . . Oh, Mazulhim! How happy you would be, if you knew how to love.

"A short time later Zephis left and Mazulhim followed her reiterating his protestations of love and gratitude; which I believed to be less sincere than Zephis merited. Zephis was too estimable for him to remain constantly faithful to her. She was genuine, candid, and no coquette. Her first affair was with Mazulhim, and that which would have been a blessing for somebody else, was for his corrupted heart only a loose relationship in which he found neither pleasure nor amusement. He deserved such women only, who, being born without sentiment or modesty, have thousands of adventures, but no lovers! and whose indecent conduct bears witness that they seek dishonor rather than pleasure. It is not astonishing

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that Mazulhim, who was nothing but a fop, was liked by women of this sort and whom he, on the other hand, preferred."

"But, Amanzai," said the Sultana, "how could a man of so little merit, move the heart of a person as estimable as Zephis?"

"If Your Majesty would remember Mazulhim's character, as I described it, you would be less astonished that Mazulhim pleased Zephis," answered Amanzai, "He was agreeable and knew how to affect virtue. Besides, Zephis was not the first reasonable woman who unfortunately loved a fop. Your Majesty knows very well that this happens very often."

"Without doubt," said the Sultan, "he is right. One sees it often, and now, do not ask me why, because I do not know."

"I am not asking you," replied the Sultana, "It is a problem that I am sure you would not be able to solve, in spite of your brilliant mind. When a reasonable woman," continued the Sultana to the assemblage, "loving tenderly and constantly a man of sentiment and honesty, of which she can always find proofs, finally yields to him, that does not surprise me. But what I cannot understand, is that such a woman should yield to a Mazulhim."

"Love," answered Amanzai, "would not be what it is if . . ."



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"If, if, if," interrupted the Sultan, "will you stop your intellectual conjectures? Don't you remember that I forbade dissertations? Why do you care, tell me, if Zephis loves this Mazulhim; that she plays the prude and he the fop? Eh, what? She loves him as he is. You want to know why? Why didn't you ask Amanzai when he was a woman? Do you think that he would remember it now? Besides, it is your fault that with all your interruptions you make him unable to finish the stories, and that wearies me. Continue! Emir, where did you stop? What became of Zephis who was so reasonable that it was annoying? What was the end of all that?"

"It was as it should have been," answered Amanzai, "at the beginning Mazulhim did not want to lose totally Zephis's attention. So he used to betray her secretly. But whether he was not cautious enough or whether his infidelity became too frequent and too conspicuous, the fact is, that she became aware of his infidelity and began to complain. But as her delicate and tender love was blind, he therefore succeeded in appeasing her dissatisfaction. He continued his infidelities and she recommenced her reproaches. Finally he lost his patience and unmoved by her love and her tears, he broke off with her and abandoned her to shame for having loved him, and to sorrow for having lost him."

"I can swear," said the Sultan, "that he did well to

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leave her, and to prove that he was right, I would have done the same. I know that she was very beautiful, that she had many merits, but those merits would have annoyed me, who likes to be amused."

Chapter XI

WHICH CONTAINS A RECIPE AGAINST ENCHANTMENT

THREE days after I met Zephis for the first time, Mazulhim arrived alone. No sooner had he time to give a few orders when a little woman of a lively, indecent and giddy disposition entered the room. From afar she looked quite splendid, but on closer view her figure was mediocre. Without her exaggerations, her ridiculousness, her silly manners and without her prodigious vivacity, which was entirely affected, one would not have noticed her at all. And this was the only reason that made Mazulhim want to see her.

“‘Oh!’ he exclaimed, when he saw her, ‘it is you? Do you know that you are wonderful to have come so early?’

“This beauty, who in spite of her childish mannerisms, was at least thirty years old, approached Mazulhim with a noble indecency of which nearly all her grace consisted, and without answering him or scarcely looking at him, she said,

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“‘You were right, when you told me that your little house was pretty. How charming it is! How tastefully furnished! How sumptuous! How divine!’

“‘Is it not true that this is the prettiest house in the suburb?’ he said.

“‘I have only seen very few of its kind,’ she answered, ‘but this room is charming and elegant.’

“‘I am happy to see you here; and that it pleases you.’

“‘Oh, as for me,’ she answered, ‘I did not make all the necessary ceremonies that I might have in order to come here. This does not mean that I don’t know the art of putting decency into an affair, but . . .’

“‘You didn’t employ all your arts—I know,’ he interrupted.

“‘Quite right,’ she answered, ‘I am not false at all. Yesterday when you told me that you loved me and made me a proposition to come here . . . I was strongly tempted to answer, ‘No,’ but the straightforwardness of my character did not permit me to do it. I am candid natural; I like you, and that is all. Do you think badly of me because of this?’

“‘What? I?’ he answered shrugging his shoulders, ‘what an idea! I can not think more highly of you than I do.’

“‘You are really charming,’ she answered, but tell me, please, how long have you been waiting?’

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“‘Not long,’ he answered rather confused, ‘Did you want to arrive here before me?’

“‘That would really have been agreeable,’ she answered, ‘a pleasant surprise for you.’

“‘You realize it very clearly,’ he replied, that such things are not done purposely, and that this might happen to any one, no matter how ardent.’

“‘Yes, yes,’ she answered, ‘I realize it very well, but I do not like it. Listen to this bit of news. Lo-beide just deserted Arebcham.’

“‘Is that all she did?’

“‘And Sophie,’ the woman continued, ‘just accepted Dara.’

“‘Is he the only one whom she took?’

“While she spoke, Mazulhim, who knew her very well and therefore respected her but slightly, took the greatest liberties with her. Far from being more moved than he, she looked around the room distractedly and fixing her eyes on the clock she said,

“‘What indiscretion, Mazulhim, shall we be alone all day?’

“‘What a question!’ he answered, ‘surely we will be alone all day.’

“‘But I did not count on that,—Oh, stop it!’ she added without any desire in the least that he should continue or discontinue it. (She was as indifferent as he), ‘you are excessively foolish but why are we to be alone, if you please?’

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“‘It seems to me,’ he answered coldly, ‘that this conversation need not disturb our amusement, if that is convenient to you?’

“‘Convenient!’ she retorted, ‘what nonsense. How did you come to that idea? I swear, I did not say a word, but after all—it is the same to me. I will know how to control you. Oh, stop it! You really have peculiar ways.’

“‘Not so singular. My ways are no more peculiar than those of others. Besides, being together as we are, I believe that I am not abusing my privilege. Ah! Zulica!’ he added, ‘having good taste, tell me please, what is your opinion of this ceiling?’

“‘I am just thinking about it,’ she said, ‘I would like it less ornamented with gilt. But even as it is I find it quite pretty,’ she added placing herself on his knees apparently without disturbing him. ‘What I think of it,’ she continued, ‘I would be very foolish to believe that you would be faithful to me, you who never were faithful to anybody.’

“‘Oh, let us not speak about it,’ he replied comfortably, continuing (thanks to her goodness) his investigation, ‘you would be quite embarrassed to find me more constant than you expected.’

“‘Oh, leave me alone,’ she said not making the slightest effort to move away from him or to restrain him. ‘In regard to my constancy,’ she remarked as

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coldly as if he had not continued, 'I have it in my nature, I dare say.'

"'Nowadays constancy is not such a virtue, as it is quite common, and everybody can, without boasting afford to be constant, but you in spite of your boasting, change many times. . . .'

"'Not so often, don't you believe it.'

"'But I know (and you are aware of it) all the lovers you have had.'

"'Well,' she said, 'if that is the case, you will admit that it was because of my virtue, that I had so many lovers, but let us finish this discourse. You irritate me.'

"'Much less than I should.'

"'But much more than I want,' she answered.

"'What!' he said, 'you don't love me? Are you going to be capricious? Wasn't it all arranged between us?'

"'Eh? but . . . yes,' she answered, 'but . . .? Ah! Mazulhim, you displease me.'

"'— is nonsense,' he answered coldly, 'that cannot . . . And then he laid her on the divan tenderly.

"'I assure you, Mazulhim,' she said to him arranging herself comfortably, 'that I am indignant at you, and I am telling you that I will never forgive you.'

"'In spite of Zulica's terrible threats, Mazulhim wanted to consummate her displeasure. Among other qualities, he had the bad habit, of indulging himself

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solely, and she apparently never expecting such conduct was displeased to an extent which is impossible to imagine. Meanwhile, in spite of her anger, she waited. Her vanity caused her to suspend her judgment. In every circumstance in which she found herself (and those were surely frequent) she never was disappointed, and this was an undeniable proof of her value. And would anybody believe that this Mazulhim, whom she found so loose, was by some miracle implacable? If, (she took it for granted,) she had nothing for which to reproach herself, why was Mazulhim who is said not to have wronged anybody, so singular in his behavior to her? She knew that everybody considered her charming; Mazulhim's reputation was too fine not to have merited it, at least in certain quarters. Therefore, the cause of her present disappointment, was not at all natural and certainly could not last.

"Having consoled herself with these reflections, she armed herself with patience and concealed her bitterness as effectively as she could. In the meantime, Mazulhim praised most gallantly her beauty which barely moved him. He told her also that probably all the magicians of India jointly endeavored to render him impotent. ' . . . but what can their charms do against yours?' he continued 'They can only delay the ultimate power of your magnetism but not triumph over it dear Zulica.'

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“Zulica, who was by all this more angered than he was disconcerted, answered him with a malicious smile which she controlled a little fearing to completely break off the affair.

“‘Are you,’ she asked with a rallying air, ‘on bad terms with the magicians? I advise you to become reconciliated to them for these kind of fellows who are able to play such tricks are the most dangerous enemies.’

“‘They would be less dangerous if you should make up your mind to get ahead of them,’ he answered, ‘and without doubt in spite of their ill will, if I loved you with less ardour, I would have proved . . .’

“‘Oh! I have very little faith in that,’ interrupted Zulica, who having herself determined how long he would remain enchanted, believed that she had had enough of delay.

“‘I know very well,’ he answered, ‘that if you judge me so rigorously, you will not be content; but the less severe you are, the more you can help to put an end to my plight.’

“‘I doubt whether this would be proper,’ she answered.

“‘I thought you were less attached to decency,’ he said rather jestingly, ‘and I dare hope . . .’

“‘You surely find the right time to joke,’ she interrupted, ‘You are right, nothing could give you more credit than this adventure.’

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“‘But, Zulica,’ he answered, ‘cannot you understand that your tone annoys me and perpetuates my humiliation?’

“‘That I assure you,’ she said, ‘concerns me the least.’

“‘But if you care so little, why are you so angry about it,’ he asked.

“‘Allow me to tell you, Sir, that the question you just put is a foolish one.’

“‘At these words she got up in spite of all the efforts he made to detain her.

“‘Leave me alone,’ she said bitterly, ‘I don’t care to see you nor to hear you.’

“‘Surely,’ he exclaimed, ‘I have already seen unhappy women, but I never saw them so angry.’

“This exclamation of Mazulhim did not please Zulica. Driven to despair by the accident that just happened, provoked by Mazulhim’s coldness, she furiously took hold of a porcelain vase that was near her, and broke it into a thousand pieces.

“‘Alas, madam,’ Mazulhim said with a smile, ‘you would not find anything to break here, if every dissatisfied woman would revenge herself in the same way, but don’t worry,’ he added, seating himself on the divan.”

“That is the kind of a woman I like,” said Schah-Baham, “She has temperament and is not like Zephis, to whom everything was the same, and who was the

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most precious fool I ever heard of in my life. I am sure this girl would interest me immensely and I recommend her to you, Amanzai, do you understand? See to it that no one ever worries her again."

"Sire," answered Amanzai, "I will favor her as much as the truth will permit.

"As soon as Mazulhim finished these words he fell into a reverie. Zulica seated herself in a corner, far from him, and for some time endured the contemptible indifference that he showed her, and in order to retaliate, she started to sing.

"Am I mistaken, or is that which you just sang, really from an opera?" he asked when she finished.

"She did not answer.

"'You have a pretty voice,' he continued, 'a bit loud, but flute-like, and the tone goes straight to the heart.'

"'It is fortunate that it pleases you,' she answered not looking at him.

"'Perhaps you will not believe it,' he answered, 'but it is nevertheless true that you ought to be proud of your voice, and there are very few people who can appreciate it as well as I do. I found in you another charm of which I would tell you if you would consider me worthy enough to praise you, and namely, that you have a charming expression, whose vivacity and propriety is beyond all one wishes, and that your eyes harmonize with it so well that it is impossible to

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hear you without being touched to the bottom of the heart. And now will you tell me again that it is fortunate that it pleases me?’

“‘No,’ she answered more pleasantly, ‘I am not angry that you find in me such lovely qualities; and the more I find that you are a connoisseur, the more I am flattered by your praises.’

“‘That is precisely the reason why I seek to deserve your merits.’

“‘Ah! there is no doubt about it,’ she said.

“‘And would you admit that you do not understand the situation?’ he continued, ‘will you be so unjust as to imagine that I am indifferent to your opinion of me? Will you add this offence to those you have accused me of already? Ah! Zulica, is it possible that this which ought to augment your tenderness toward me, only serves to provoke you against me?’

“‘Is it possible,’ she answered enraged, ‘that you consider me such a dupe, that the most cruel affront you could offer me, I would mistake as a proof of love?’

“‘An affront!’ he exclaimed, ‘Sweet Zulica! You know love too little if you think that we ought to blush because of what happened to us. I shall not be afraid to tell you more: the men whom you have honored with your affections, have loved you very little, if you did not find them as unfortunate as I am.’

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“‘If that is the case, Sir,’ she said rising, ‘stop it or I will go out. I cannot bear your ridiculous and indecent words any more.’

“‘I know they hurt you,’ he answered, ‘and I must admit that I am surprised that they have this effect on you; but what I cannot realize at all is why you so obstinately accuse me of guilt. It would be simple to me if any ordinary woman, not knowing the world, nor the habits of society, should be offended by a similar adventure; but you, who are so unusually perfect! Truly that is not pardonable.’

“‘Indeed!’ she said, ‘I suppose one would be the greatest fool in the world not to be flattered by this adventure, and I ought to thank you for the wonderful impression I produced upon you!’

“‘Jesting aside,’ he said rising, ‘I want to prove to you that I am not wrong.’

“‘No, Sir,’ she retorted, ‘I forbid you to approach me.’

“‘I will obey your order, unjust as it is , and I will demonstrate it to you from a distance, if you approve.’

“‘Very well,’ she answered, ‘that will surely be more convenient for me, but do more and talk less. I am not so stupid as to be convinced by you, that a lover, the more tender he is the less he can express his love.’

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“‘That means,’ he answered with nonchalance, ‘that you believe the contrary.’

“‘Yes,’ she replied, exactly, one cannot be more convinced of anything than I am of this.’

“‘Well, madam, you can boast of being the least delicate woman in the world, and were it not that I love you to such an extent that there is no power under the sun that could tear me away from you your way of thinking, I must confess, would keep me away from you forever.’

“‘It would really be astonishing,’ she answered, ‘if my way of thinking would please you.’

“‘Oh, no,’ he answered with a detached air, ‘it does not interest me, as much as you would like to make me believe, to declare myself an enemy to your thoughts. But one thing is certain that the more one is in love the less he brings his senses into use. Only coarse hearts which can not be penetrated by the charms of voluptuousness, can be masters of themselves at the moment when you found me so deficient. If the hope of pleasure is sufficient to trouble a lover, then consider, what an effect the approach of the happy moment that he so ardently desires would produce upon him. How weary his soul becomes from all the ecstasy that preceded these moments, and whether my disorder for which you reproach me, is really so unflattering to a woman whose self-possession is so complete; and who expected the same from

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me? Tell me frankly,' he added, throwing himself on his knees, is it the first time that you . . .'

"'Oh, stop your inopportune jesting,' she interrupted, 'leave me! I want to go, and I do not want to ever see you again.'

"'But, Zulica,' he said leading her toward the divan, 'don't you realize that your treatment of my misfortune, creates the impression that you do not believe your charms sufficient to alter the situation?'

"Either Mazulhim's delicate distinctions disposed Zulica to be kinder, or the fine reputation he enjoyed made her believe that all he said was probable; she allowed him to lead her to the divan, with a slight resistance that usually inflames more than it hinders. Little by little she yielded to him, and he again reached the same ineffectual point that had so angered her before.

"Already excited by Mazulhim's ardour, she began strongly to desire that his senses should not again become paralyzed. She was even hopeful, as Mazulhim was more delicate than ever, but he cruelly failed to content her. She was so much more indignant (apart from vanity) than she would have been, had he conducted himself differently."

"Oh, Heavens!" said the Sultan, "will he ever finish? That annoys me as well as her. It is not because I take Zulica's part, but I am asking you whether there is anybody whom this would not put out of

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sorts, and whether the patience of a Dervich could endure it? It is hardly worth the trouble to listen to. Amanzai, you did not promise me this. You make me think that you purposely discriminate against this woman, and I am telling you that it is not just."

"But, no, Sire," answered Amanzai, "were I telling Your Majesty a legend, it would be very easy for me to arrange the details as I would like, but I am telling you what I saw and therefore, I cannot make Mazulhim act differently without changing the truth."

"Oh, this foolish Mazulhim," exclaimed Schah-Baham, "I am so disgusted with him."

"But I do not know why," interposed the Sultana, "you expect so much from him. He did not do it more expressly than you would have."

"He?" replied the Sultan, "I do not know anything about it. He was a bad man."

"Besides," the Sultana continued, "that Zulica to whom you took such a liking was the worst . . ."

"You may consider her as base as you please, madam," interrupted the Sultan, "but, please, do not speak badly about her. The fact that I am friendly to anyone is sufficient reason for you to dislike that person. That offends me, I assure you."

"Your anger does not frighten me," answered the Sultana, "Moreover, I would not be surprised, that this Zulica whom you like so much today, would bore you to death tomorrow."

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"I doubt it; I do not anticipate like you do; at any rate, let us hear the rest of the story."

"Zulica," continued the Emir, "inflamed with fury caused by Mazulhim's new affront against her charms, said as she pushed him violently away,

"'Really, Sir, if that was the preference you gave me, I dare say that it was ill chosen.'

"'I would be the first one to say so,' he answered, 'if I could imagine that you believe for a moment to merit the wrong that I did you. But I do not see any sign of it, and I avow without reserve that I am solely to blame.'

"'When one is aware of his own shortcomings, he ought to leave others alone,' she said.

"'That certainly would be the attitude I would take if that were the case,' he answered, 'However, you will permit me to flatter myself to the contrary.'

"'In truth,' she said, 'I am not advising you.'

"She then got up, took her fan and gloves and taking out a box of powder she went to the mirror. While all her attention was engaged in trying to put herself in the same condition as when she arrived, Mazulhim, who came behind her, disturbing her work, begged her tenderly not to give herself any trouble, for she would surely have to start the same work over again. Zulica answered him with a look that convinced him that she put very little belief

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in his prediction, but as she saw that he did not stop tormenting her, she said to him:

“‘Well, Sir, will all this last forever? Do you not want me to be able to leave? Just tell me.’

“‘As far as I can recollect, everything has been decided long ago—won’t you stay for supper?’

“‘Not that I know of,’ she answered.

“‘And you see,’ he said smiling, ‘that you did not even count on it.’

“‘Besides, I am engaged,’ she said, ‘and it is late.’

“‘That is nonsense,’ he said, throwing her upon the divan, trying again to find means of making the time pass more rapidly.

“‘Listen, Mazulhim,’ she said in a softer tone, ‘you may take my word, I assure you without anger, but the role you make me play is unbearable.’

“‘More kindness on your part would make me complain less, but you are not at all obliging.’

“‘In truth,’ she answered, ‘It would certainly be very inconsiderate to rob you of the only excuse that you can find.’

“He answered her firmly that he voluntarily took that chance. Finally she became reasonable, and decided to enjoy the pleasures of heaping up against him all possible fault. The more pity he deserved, the more indignant she was at him (for she was not born generous). Wounded by his little susceptibility to her charms, she was hurt because he responded so

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badly to her last favours; only her vanity enabled her to endure that which hurt her so painfully. As soon as she was almost certain of her triumph she saw him becoming faint. Twenty times she was ready to succumb to a hope which offered itself to her, but which did not materialize. Ah, well! After all she did for Mazulhim, would she abandon him to his destiny? One moment more might conquer his insusceptibility. If it had been agreeable to owe all to the tenderness of Mazulhim, it would have been more gratifying to have won him over entirely.

“This reasoning of Zulica’s was not altogether just, but considering the situation in which she was, it was marvelous that she could reason at all. From the way in which she looked at him, Mazulhim understood that in order to counteract the obstinate coldness that he, in spite of himself, showed her, he would have to lavish upon her the most flattering praises concerning her compassionate character.

“‘Without doubt,’ she said during a moment of impatience when the favours she bestowed upon him, rose in her regard, ‘you must admit that I have a noble soul.’

“At this exclamation of hers, Mazulhim could not restrain himself from breaking into laughter, and Zulica who knew how distracting it was to laugh, at this time, was quite seriously angry at his giddiness. Mazulhim’s gaiety did not seem to have such fatal

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results as she feared. The magicians who were persecuting him so cruelly began to withdraw their enchantments from him. Though the victory over the enchanters was so near, yet she did not voice her congratulations too prematurely. She wanted to encourage Mazulhim with the confidence she seemed to have in him. She knew too little to realize that he required it.

"As soon as Mazulhim, who was the most conceited man in the world, felt less crushed, he carried his rashness to a degree where he believed that he was capable of great enterprises. Zulica who had sounder judgment than he, could have enlightened him, but she could not stop him. Whether he thought that delay would disturb him or he considered that there was no more to be said, he was anxious to try his prowess once more. Zulica, who was not so easily dazzled (and who by the way, was not a person who thought badly of herself) was astonished at Mazulhim's presumption. It did not succeed. She did not refuse him the most affectionate responses—but they failed. In order to more keenly humiliate him, she lent herself to every ridiculous advance he made.

"'Oh, yes,' she said with a disdainful air.

"All of a sudden his face changed and I could judge by his intoxication as well as by his derisive and his victorious air, that the climax which was considered

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by Zulica as unachievable, was reached to its last stage."

"You see," said the Sultan, "either the women complain, or they perform miracles? This is good to know."

"What an admirable discovery you have just made!" said the Sultana.

"Now I will know," answered the Sultan, "if anybody should ever reproach me, what I will have to say. Nevertheless I am sorry for Zulica that this mortification happened to her. She deserved it less than anybody else. Continue, Emir. You have just told me so many fascinating stories that I have great confidence in the rest."

BOOK TWO

Chapter XII

MORE IN THE NATURE OF THE PRECEDING ONE

"If all this unpleasantness that happened to Zulica mortified her, it did not, however, rob her of her presence of mind, a quality so necessary in similarly regretful situations. She congratulated Mazulhim, she complained of her anger, and in order to save his pride, she was not afraid to bestow upon him an honour which he assuredly did not merit.

"I do not know why, whether to mortify Zulica, or desiring (contrary to his usual way) to administer justice to himself, Mazulhim did not want to credit himself with the qualities with which she endowed him. He had, he said persistently, unhappy days and if one could foresee them, one would rather die than await them. Zulica agreed that there are some days that do not commence brilliantly, but they end in a fashion more to be praised than to be complained of.

"I must confess," she added with pretended ten-

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derness, 'that I had reason to believe that what you have told me hundreds of times about my beauty was not sincere, and that everything you seemed to admire was effaced by my failings, which so shocked you because you did not expect them, but now I feel reassured.'

"'Ah! Zulica,' exclaimed the pitiless Mazulhim, 'your fears were that of a mediocre person. I know what I owe to your kindness, but that does not blind me at all, and the more generous I find you, the more remorseful I am.'

"'But how foolish,' she answered, 'At least do not adopt such false notions. Nothing could be more unjust.'

"On finishing these words, they started to promenade the room, each one strongly embarrassed by the other. Without love, without any desires, and forced by their mutual imprudence and prearrangement of this rendez-vous, in this small house, forced to spend the rest of the day together, which they did not seem to know how to pass in a way that would satisfy them. Zulica had varied reflections to make about the falseness of reputation. What she mostly despaired of (I could easily read her innermost thoughts) was that there was no way of revenging herself on Mazulhim. 'If I tell everything,' she thought, 'who would believe me? And if people would believe me, won't they think (as they have a

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good opinion of Mazulhim) that he was so unsuccessful with me because I had nothing to offer? Whatever I do, I will not be able to convince anybody.' These ideas made her quite sad. Mazulhim did not seem to be interested in anything. For some time he walked back and forth without saying a word, but every now and then he smiled in a cold and restrained manner.

"'You dream?' he finally said.

"'Are you astonished?' she answered prudishly, 'do you think it is a matter of course for a reasonable woman to be with a man as I am with you?'

"'No,' he answered, 'I think that reasonable women are quite accustomed to it.'

"'It seems that you ignore what effect this has on them and how much they have to struggle before they give in,' she answered.

"'What you say is very probable,' he replied, 'but judging by the way they shorten their struggles, I can easily see how cruelly women are fatigued by them.'

"'Here!' she exclaimed, those are the most foolish words one ever could utter. Do you think you had a clear mind when you made that remark. Do you know that only a fop could say it?'

"'I don't think they are so foolish after all . . .'

"'You would find that comment false if you knew what it had cost me before I succumbed to you.'

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“‘Oh, that is what you were thinking?’ he exclaimed, ‘That offends me. I flatter myself to the contrary. Eh? Tell me please, did Zadis cost you so many reflections too?’

“‘What do you mean?’ she asked coldly, ‘who is Zadis?’

“‘I beg your pardon,’ he answered with a smile, ‘I would have sworn that you knew him.’

“‘Yes,’ she answered, ‘just as I know everybody.’

“‘I think, though little as you know him, that he would be pretty angry to know that you are here,’ he continued, and unless I am greatly mistaken, the favours that you granted me would annoy him very much. Be sincere with me,’ he said as he saw her shrugging her shoulders, ‘Zadis pleased you before I had the good fortune to please you, and I would even wager that you are very well suited to each other.’

“‘That is on your part, a pretty tasteless pleasantry,’ she answered.

“‘Really,’ he continued, ‘even if you have been unfaithful to him, he will nevertheless be very happy. A man like Zadis is not fit to be loved, and I was always surprised to see that a woman as full of life as you are, with such charming gaiety should accept such a cold and taciturn lover.’

“‘You are very much mistaken, Mazulhim,’ she answered, ‘he is quite tender. I have sacrificed him

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for you, it would be useless to tell you the contrary, but I am afraid you will force me soon to repent of it.'

"'You were frivolous,' he answered, 'and I was, I confess, inconstant; but the less ready we were until now to have a serious attachment, the more glorious it would be for us now to become firmly attracted to each other.' Saying this he conducted her to the divan, but it could easily be seen that only delicacy guided his steps.

"'It is true that you are charming,' he said, 'and without a certain prudish air, that has not left you even with me, I never saw a woman who could make a lover more happy than you could.'

"'I confess,' she replied, 'that I am by nature a bit reserved, but you must not complain of that.'

"'You can make me happy, there is no doubt about it,' he answered, 'but born without any desires, you do not sympathize with those whom you arouse to desire. I sense in everything that you do for me, a certain constraint. You fear all the time to abandon yourself too freely, and between us, I suspect that you are not very susceptible.' Mazulhim pressed Zulica's hands as he spoke thus to her, 'Though the excess of your charms does me harm,' he continued, 'I do not know how to deprive myself of the pleasure of admiring them again, and even if I perish, so much beauty cannot be concealed from me for a long time.

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God!' he cried in sudden passion, 'if it is only possible, make me worthy of this happiness!'

"No matter what was said about her susceptibility, the admiration in which Mazulhim was immersed, the vivacity of his transports, all the pains he took to make her share them, all this moved and disturbed Zulica.

"'And you complain?' she asked tenderly.

"He did not answer, but wanted to prove to her all his thankfulness; but Zulica remembering how little he was to be relied upon, and doubting all his ardour said to him in a tone that revealed all her apprehension,

"'Aren't you loving me too much?'

"Though Mazulhim could not control his amusement at her terror, she found herself loved less than she feared to be. Their mutual happiness freed them from that constraint and annoyance which they had for each other for some time. Their conversation became animated. Zulica, who believed that she delivered Mazulhim from the hands of the enchanters, was proud of what her charms had accomplished. and Mazulhim, who was now more satisfied with himself also, abandoned himself to his enjoyment. While they were in this happy frame of mind, supper was served. The feast was gay. Zulica and Mazulhim, who were without doubt, the two most wicked persons in the court of Agra, did not spare anybody.

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“‘Could you not tell me,’ asked Mazulhim, ‘what is the reason that Altun-Can assumed during the last few days such important air?’

“‘Heavens! Certainly! Don’t you know that he is on extremely good terms with Aïscha?’

“‘But that, it seems to me, should be a good reason to be modest.’

“‘Yes, for somebody else,’ she replied, ‘but haven’t you found him too happy?’

“‘I will confess, that no,’ he answered, ‘ridiculous as Altun-Can is I cannot help being sorry for him. A man who belongs to Aïscha is undoubtedly the most unhappy man in the world.’

“‘And what is very peculiar,’ she said, ‘is that she makes a mystery of it.’

“‘Ah! this time you do not do her justice. Aïscha has never hidden her lovers, and I can assure you that now at her age and with her enormous figure, she would less than ever be disposed to hide them.’

“‘Still nothing is more true than what I told you.’

“‘Well, if that is the case, then Altun-Can must have asked her to keep the liaison a secret,’ he answered.

“‘And the little Mesem,’ he asked, ‘I think you do not see her any more?’

“‘That is because she cannot be seen any more,’ Zulica answered, assuming a prudish manner, ‘and because her conduct is miserable.’

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“‘You are right,’ he answered seriously, ‘nothing is so important to a woman who respects herself, than to have good company. I find,’ he continued, ‘that she grows more beautiful.’

“‘Quite the contrary,’ Zulica answered, ‘she became quite hideous.’

“‘I do not agree with you,’ he replied. ‘A short time ago, her complexion became quite yellow, and her air of dejection was very becoming to her. If she would continue to look unhealthy, she would become very charming.’

“‘I would never finish this story, Sire,” Amanzai interrupted himself finally, “if I should have to relate to Your Majesty all their conversation.”

“‘I understand it well,” answered the Sultan, “and I permit you to cut it short. However, when I think of it, I nevertheless feel like asking you to tell it to me in full.”

“‘I take the liberty of telling Your Majesty,” answered Amanzai, “that many things in their conversation would interest you very little.”

“‘Yes, quite right,” interrupted the Sultan, “that would not interest me at all. Why, I have thought of this at least twenty times, why is there not one story that is entirely interesting?”

“‘For many reasons,” interposed the Sultana, “that which leads to a fact is not as interesting as the fact itself. Then, if everything would always be of the

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same degree of interest, it would in the long run weary us. The mind cannot always be attentive, the heart could not endure the tension of constant emotion, and consequently both need an occasional respite."

"I understand," answered the Sultan, "it is as if in order to enjoy keener pleasure one must sometimes suffer pain. If one has sound judgment and a certain way of thinking he cannot help guessing everything. Continue, Amanzai."

"Mazulhim was less affected by Zulica's charms after supper than he was during the whole day. Among a thousand ideas how to amuse Zulica, he could not find even one that would suit her and she prepared to leave, with such an air, that I doubted whether I should see her again. But in spite of Zulica's lack of humour, and of the manner that he treated her, Mazulhim, before she left, asked her to call again and added with eagerness that this should be within the next two days. Though she had at this moment very little desire to fulfill his wish, that seemed to be so ardent, she answered him that she would, but with such frigidity that I could hardly imagine that she would keep her word. At the moment I thought, that after Mazulhim's departure, I should be bored in this little house; that it would be quite time enough if I would come here on his return, and in order to amuse and instruct myself, I

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could not do better than to follow Zulica to her home. I clung tenaciously to this idea and followed Zulica into her palanquin. As soon as I found myself in her palace, the movement of attraction with which Brahma invested me, helped me hide in the first divan that I saw.

“The next day when Zulica was making her toilet, Zadis was announced. Whether she wanted to appear in her usual beauty and radiance before his eyes, or she thought that he would become indecent if he would see her in her present disorder—she asked him to wait. Knowing Zulica’s falseness, the latter reason was not as imaginary as it seemed.

“Finally Zadis came in and even if his name had not been mentioned when he was announced, I would have recognized him from Mazulhim’s description. He was grave, cold, constrained, and had the air of treating love with that dignity of sentiment and with such a scrupulous delicacy which is nowadays considered so ridiculous, and which perhaps was always more boresome than respectable. Zadis approached Zulica with timidity as if he had not previously declared his passion. She on her part, received him with elaborate and ceremonious politeness, and with the modesty which she employed to deceive him.

“As long as her attendants were present Zulica and Zadis spoke indifferently about current news or

other such trivial matters. Zadis, who thought he was the only man whom Zulica loved and who imagined that her merits deserved the greatest consideration, did not even dare to look at her; and Zulica, who in spite of every appearance, found a lover who was foolish enough to respect her, imitated his reserve or looked at him with her hypocritical and downcast eyes, which prudish women are wont to employ at every occasion.

"In spite of all his efforts at dissimulation, Zulica noticed his eyes displaying a different sadness than usual. She asked him in vain what was wrong. To all the questions she put to him in very dulcet tones, he responded with a profound reverence and with a still more profound sigh.

"When her hair was dressed, her women left the room.

"‘Will you please tell me, Zadis,’ she asked with an authoritative air, ‘what is the matter with you? Don’t you think, that being as interested in you as I am, I have reason to be angry about your silence? In one word, I want you to answer me. I will not forgive you if you continue your reticence.’

"‘I am afraid you will not forgive me after I have spoken,’ he answered at last, ‘and therefore, that which troubles me ought by no means to be imparted to you.’

"Zulica insisted and urged him to such a degree

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that he was certain he could not continue his silence any longer without offending her.

“‘Will you believe me, madam?’ he said blushing because of the absurdity which he found his declaration to be laden with, ‘I am jealous!’

“‘You! Zadis!’ she exclaimed with astonishment, ‘I love you; you love me, and you are jealous? Do you know what you are saying?’

“‘Ah, madam,’ he replied in a heart-broken manner, ‘do not crush me with your anger! I feel the ridiculousness of my notions. I am blushing because of them. My mind disregards the suspicions of my heart and disavows them. Nevertheless, I am carried away by them, and in spite of all my respect and esteem for you, I cannot help being cruelly tormented. The shame that these suspicions cause me cannot annihilate them.’

“‘Listen to me, Zadis,’ she said to him majestically, ‘and remember forever what I will tell you. I love you and I am not afraid to repeat it to you. I am going to give you proof of my sentiments, proof which for you should be sufficient. I forgive you your suspicions. I could even tell you, that all the efforts you employed to conquer me, and the way in which I live, should give you no reason whatsoever to doubt me. Besides, a person of my character ought to inspire confidence. I ought to despise your fears or feel insulted by them, but it pleases my heart to

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reassure you, and my love condescends to explanation.'

"'Ah, madam,' he exclaimed, prostrating himself at her feet, 'I believe that you love me and I would die of grief if I thought that my suspicions, which I myself did not entertain long, should give you reason to doubt my respect for you.'

"'No, Zadis,' she answered smiling, 'I don't doubt it at all, but let me know what made you so anxious?'

"'What does it matter, madam, as long as I am no longer anxious.'

"'I want to know,' she insisted.

"'Well,' he said, 'Mazulhim's attention toward you seemed to make me . . .'

"'What,' she interrupted him, 'were you jealous of him? Ah! Zadis, ought you to fear Mazulhim? Do you despise me so much that you think that he could please me? Oh! Zadis, ought I and can I ever forgive you for this?'

Chapter XIII

THE CLOSE OF ONE ADVENTURE AND THE OPENING OF ANOTHER

WHEN she finished these words, her eyes became suffused with tears, and Zadis, who believed they were sincere could not help intermingling his own tears with hers.

“‘Yes, I was wrong,’ he said tenderly, ‘and no matter how violent my passion is for you it cannot serve as an excuse.’

“‘Ah! how cruel,’ she said sobbing, ‘be jealous if you wish to; abandon yourself to your frenzy; I consent. But if you know me so little that you do not trust my affection, at least do not suspect me as being capable of loving Mazulhim.’

“‘I believe that you do not love him,’ he answered, ‘and I never imagined that you could develop a taste for him, but I cannot but shudder, on seeing him come here.’

“‘And he is, however,’ she answered, ‘the least dangerous of all whom you see coming here. If my heart were not already filled with the strongest pas-

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sion, if Mazulhim would adore me; and if his virtues would, if it were possible, surpass all his vices, he would still be in my eyes, the least desirable. How could you expect that a woman, I would not say who respects herself, but who has not lost all her shame, would want to take Mazulhim; a man who never loved, who declares publicly that he is incapable of passion; to whom even the feeblest sentiment is an idle fancy, who knows no other pleasure than to dishonor women. I will give up speaking about that as too ridiculous for words. Of course, it is not because I have nothing more to say about it, but I would blush to prolong this conversation about Mazulhim. And though I find your suspicions as insulting as misplaced, I am glad that you confided in me the reason of your anxiety and I assure you that you will not see him here except when I find it necessary to break up with him.'

"Zadis kissed her hand with transport and thanked her many times for all that she did for him.

"'Why do you thank me?' she asked, 'I did not sacrifice anything for you.'

"'But, madam,' he said to her, is it possible that Mazulhim never has told you that he found you to be lovely?'

"'What nonsense!' she exclaimed smiling. 'Oh, no, I assure you that Mazulhim knows me better than you do, and frivolous as he pretends to be, he knows

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that he is not the kind that appeals to women of my type. But I would not be surprised if he, without ever having wanted me, or even spoken to me, wouldn't say publicly that he was or that he is on very good terms with me. In truth, I am sure,' she added laughingly, 'that only one who is as jealous as you would believe him—isn't that true?'

"'No,' he replied, 'I would be foolish enough to fear it sometimes, but I swear to you that I never would believe it.'

"'And I would not vouch for that at all,' she answered, 'with your disposition it would simply be a joy for you to listen to evil about your mistress, and then to create the biggest scandal in the world, because some fop, knowing your character, has a fancy to arouse your suspicions.'

"'Pray, spare me,' he pleaded, 'and consider that my jealousy which you were kind enough to forgive me . . .'

"'Will probably not be the last for today,' she interrupted, 'for the arrival of Mazulhim would plunge you into despair again.'

"'Don't speak about him any more,' he answered, 'and as you have pardoned me and as everything, even my injustice, proves only how much I adore you, let us not waste precious time; but allow me to confirm my good fortune.'

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"At these words, which Zulica understood quite well, she assumed an embarrassed air, and said,

"‘How importunate you are with your desires. Won’t you ever sacrifice them for me? If you knew how much I would love you if you were more reasonable . . . It is true,’ she added as she saw him smiling, ‘I would love you a thousand times more. I think so at least, because not being afraid of anything that I might dislike in you, I would yield with much more ardour to the qualities which already please me.’ Even while saying these august words, she languidly permitted herself to be led toward the divan. ‘I swear to you,’ she said to Zadis when she was on the cushion, ‘that I will never again quarrel with you.’

"‘I wish it were so,’ he answered, ‘but I can hardly hope for it.’

"‘And I,’ she replied, ‘considering what the reconciliation cost me, believe it.’

"In spite of her repugnance, she yielded to his eagerness, but with such propriety, such majesty, such prudery, which have never had their equal in similar circumstances. Somebody other than Zadis would surely have complained of this; but he, who was attached to the most minute decorum, felt that Zulica’s misplaced virtue filled him with pleasure and he imitated as much as he could her haughty and dig-



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nified manners, and the less response she showed him the more content he became.

"I don't know what she was thinking of, but she proposed that he spend the day with her. In order that nobody might know that they were together, and how long they were together, and, in a word, to avoid talk, rather than for any other reason, she ordered her servants to say that she was not at home. Zadis whom jealousy usually rendered more amorous, responded completely to Zulica's kindness and in spite of his taciturn nature did not bore her even for one moment. He left her at about midnight, as convinced as one could be, that Zulica was the most reasonable and the most affectionate woman in Agra.

"I have already said that judging by the way Zulica left Mazulhim and by her method of thinking I did not believe that she would care to continue an affair so distasteful to a woman of her character, where neither love nor pleasure were expected; nevertheless her curiosity prevailed over her reason. She told Zadis on leaving him that a very important engagement would prevent her from seeing him the next day; and as soon as the time of the rendezvous with Mazulhim arrived, she entered her palanquin and followed by my soul she started for the little house, where a slave awaited both her and Mazulhim.

"How is it,' she said harshly to the slave, 'that he has not yet arrived? It is charming of him to let me

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wait. Isn't he admirable to permit me to come first?'

"The slave assured her that Mazulhim would arrive presently.

"'I wonder,' she answered, 'why he assumes such a peculiar attitude.'

"The slave departed and Zulica, very angry, reclined on the divan. As she was by nature impetuous, she did not remain tranquil, and accusing herself of being extremely light-minded, she swore many times not to see Mazulhim any more. Finally she heard a carriage stop. Ready to tell Mazulhim all that she had on her mind, she rose quickly and opening the door, she said,

"'Indeed, Sir, you have very peculiar and uncommon ways. . . . Ah! Heavens!' she cried out as she saw the man who entered.

"I was nearly as astonished as she was, when I saw a man enter whom neither of us knew.

"What? asked the Sultan, "it was not Mazulhim?"

"No, Your Majesty," answered Amanzai.

"It was not he?" echoed the Sultan, "that is decidedly strange. And why wasn't it he?"

"Your Majesty will find out presently."

"Do you know," answered the Sultan, "that nothing is so odd as this. Ah! I am sure this man made an error. I can understand it easily. But tell me, Amanzai, what kind of a little house was this? All the time you have mentioned it, I pretended that I

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knew all about it, but in truth I am not able to pretend any longer.”

“Sire,” replied Amanzai, “this was an out of the way house, where people without any attendants or witnesses . . .”

“O, yes,” interrupted the Sultan, “I understand, indeed. That is really very convenient. Continue!”

“The anger and the surprise that seized her, as she saw the man who had just arrived, prevented her from speaking.

“‘I know, madam,’ said the Hindu to her very diffidently, ‘how astonished you are to see me. I also know that you expected to meet some one else here—not me. If my presence surprises you, yours does not cause me less emotion. I did not expect that the person to whom Mazulhim asked me to deliver his excuses, would be such a one as you. Were I in his position I would have been strongly averse to missing this opportunity. It is not because Mazulhim is at fault, no, madam, he knows what he owes to your favours. He was extremely anxious to be at your feet, and to tell you about his thankfulness, but cruel orders, which he even wanted to disobey, sacred as they ought to be to him, forced him away from such a sweet pleasure. He thought that he ought rather rely upon my discretion, than on that of a slave, and not to place in danger a secret in which you also are involved.’

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“Zulica was so astonished at this adventure, that if the Hindu would have spoken much longer she would not have had the strength to interrupt him. Her embarrassment caused her even to wish that he should continue speaking. Consternated and nearly motionless, she lowered her eyes, did not dare to look at him; blushed with shame and anger. Finally she began to weep. The Hindu taking her hand politely conducted her to the divan and without a word she fell on it.

“‘I see, madam,’ he continued, ‘you obstinately persist in believing Mazulhim guilty, and all I tell you to justify him, seems to augment your anger against him. How happy he should be. Though he is my friend, I envy him the precious tears that you shed on his account. What love! . . .’

“‘Who told you, Sir, that I love him?’ Zulica interrupted haughtily, when she had time enough to compose herself. ‘Could I not have come here with a purpose that has nothing to do with love? Cannot I see Mazulhim without conceiving for him sentiments which you seem to attribute to me? What reasons have you to dare assume that he affected my heart?’

“‘I dare believe,’ answered the Hindu smiling, ‘that if my conjectures are not true, they are at least probable. The tears that you are shedding, your anger, the time at which I find you in a place devoted only to love, . . . all this made me believe that only

love brought you here. Do not defend yourself, madam, . . . you love. Consider the object as a crime if you will, but not the passion.'

"'What!' exclaimed Zulica, 'because no one could deny his lie, Mazulhim dared tell you that I love him?'

"'Yes, madam.'

"'And you believe him?' she asked with astonishment.

"'Allow me to tell you,' he answered, 'that his story was so probable that it would have been ridiculous to doubt it.'

"'Well, yes,' she sighed, 'yes, I loved him. I told him so and I came here to prove it. This ingrate brought me to this. But this perfidious man will never have other proofs of my love than the weakness that I have already displayed to him. One day later . . . heaven! and what would have become of me?'

"'Eh! Madam,' said the Hindu coldly, 'do you think that Mazulhim thinks so ill of me that he entrusted me only with but half of the secret?'

"'What did he tell you then,' she enquired bitterly, 'did he add calumny to outrage? Would he be so low?'

"'Mazulhim may be indiscreet, but I can hardly believe him to be liar.'

"'Oh! the knave!' she cried out, 'it is the first time that I am here.'

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“‘I believe you because you want me to,’ he responded, ‘I would rather believe that Mazulhim deceived me, than doubt what you say. But before whom do you defend yourself? Madam, if you wish to do me justice, I dare flatter myself that you would have less to fear, were I the recipient of your confidences. You cry? . . . oh! You do too much honor to that ingrate. Beautiful as you are, do you not think that you could revenge yourself? Yes, madam, Mazulhim told me everything. I even know that you have fulfilled his desires; I even know details about his happiness that would astonish you. Do not feel hurt about it,—his happiness was too great for him to contain himself. Were he less contented, less transported, he would no doubt have been more discreet. It was not his vanity, but his joy that could not be silenced.’

“‘Mazulhim!’ she interrupted with venomous passion, ‘ah! the traitor; What? Mazulhim sacrificed me? He told you all? He did well,’ she continued with greater composure, ‘I did not yet know men, and thanks to him I will overcome my weakness.’

“‘Eh! Madam,’ he answered coldly, pretending to believe her, ‘that would be vengeance—that would be punishing yourself.’

“‘No,’ she answered, ‘no, all men are treacherous. My experience was too cruel not to believe that. They all resemble Mazulhim.’

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“‘Ah, no, do not conclude that,’ he exclaimed, ‘I swear to you that if you would put me in his place, you would form a different opinion.’

“‘But, these orders that hold him back,’ she resumed, ‘are they not but a false pretence? I do not doubt that he abandoned me. Ah . . . do not fear to tell me the truth.’

“‘Well, yes, madam,’ admitted the Hindu, ‘it would be useless to conceal it. Mazulhim does not love you any longer.’

“‘He does not love my any more!’ she exclaimed sadly, ‘oh, this blow will kill me. The wretch! Is that the reward he reserved for my tenderness?’

“When she finished these words she made a few more exclamations and feigned a few more tears. The Hindu, who knew her, did not deter her from this display, and pretended to be overcome by admiration for her.

“‘I feel I am dying, Sir,’ she said after having wept a long time, ‘one cannot injure a heart as tender and delicate as mine without being punished for it. What would he do, if I should betray him?’

“‘He would adore you,’ answered the Hindu.

“‘I can not understand all this,’ she answered, ‘I am simply bewildered. If this ungrateful man does not love me any more and hesitates to let me know, could he not have written to me? Does anyone end

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an affair so despicably? And why was it necessary to choose you to deliver this news?’

“‘I can see very clearly,’ answered the Hindu, ‘that you object more to the confidant than the confidence itself, and I swear to you that you would not see me here, as I realize your unjust aversion to me, if Mazulhim had told me the name of the lady to whom he asked me to deliver his excuses. And I even doubt, as I am disposed more kindly to you than you are to me, of which I am unfortunately aware, whether I would have believed it, if he had named Zulica; for I could never believe that there is anybody in the world who would not consider himself happy to be loved by her. It is innocently that I am contributing to the keen chagrin which you seem to suffer, and I am sorry to be involved in a secret, which you would prefer to trust to others, rather than to me.’

“‘I do not know what makes you think so,’ she answered with embarrassment, ‘such secrets are ordinarily not entrusted to anybody, but I have no particular reasons . . .’

“‘Pardon me, madam,’ he interrupted quickly, ‘you hate me, I am aware at every occasion that my mind, my body, my manners, are the objects of your mockery and your criticism. I must confess that if I have any virtues, I owe them to the desire to be worthy of your praises, or at least, to oblige you to

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forgive my despicable traits, for which you never cease to upbraid me.'

"'I?' she said blushing, 'I never said anything about you that should make you feel so badly. Besides, we hardly know each other. You never gave me any reasons to complain, and I do not consider myself ridiculous enough . . .'

"'For mercy's sake, madam, let us stop speaking about it. Any longer explanation will worry you. But since we are on this subject, allow me to tell you, madam, that my feelings for you, feelings which your injustice could not alter for a minute, that they deserve your pity and not your condemnation. Yes, madam,' he continued, 'nothing in the world could extinguish the unfortunate love that you have inspired. Your aversion, your hatred, your stubborn animosity make me lament, but do not cure me. I know your heart too well to hope that some day you might feel toward me that which I desire so much, but I hope that my discretion regarding you, will cause you to drop your prejudices, and if your heart does not permit you to grant me friendship, at least, you will not deny me your esteem.'

"Zulica, being won over by this respectful discourse, confessed to him that through a caprice, whose source she could not fathom, she had declared herself his enemy; but she was wrong and decided to redeem

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that impression, so that there would be no more misunderstandings between them, and she assured him of her respect, her friendship and her gratitude. After having asked him to keep the secret as inviolable, she rose up with the intention of leaving.

“‘Where do you want to go, madam?’ asked the Hindu detaining her, ‘You have nobody here. I sent my men away, and the hour at which they must return is still far off.’

“‘Nevertheless,’ she answered, ‘I can not stay in a place where everything recalls my weakness.’

“‘Forget Mazulhim,’ he answered, this house does not belong to him any more. He transferred it to me. Permit me, the man who is most deeply interested in you, to beg you to command it. Consider only what you want to do. You can not leave at this hour without running the risk of being met by some one. Do not let your anger make you forget what you owe to yourself. Consider the fearful gossip you will arouse; consider that tomorrow you might be the talk of all of Agra; and with all your virtue and sentiments that ought to be respected, people will believe you to be a person with whom such adventures are usual.

“Zulica resisted for a long time the reasons that Nasess, (this was the Hindu’s name,) advanced to induce her to remain.

“‘Everything has been prepared for your recep-

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tion,' he added, 'allow me to spend this evening with you. All that you are, all that I myself am ought to convince you of my respect for you. I am not basing it upon my sentiments. If I still dare to tell you about them, I do it only in order to make you feel to what extent I am interested in you, and to free you from the sinister effect that Mazulhim's indiscretion seemed to produce upon you.' And after some additional feeble resistance, Zulica, persuaded by Nasses' words, consented to stay.

"Thinking the way you do, madam,' he said, 'you ought to be astonished to find yourself so sensitive?'

"Well," interrupted the Sultan, "he did not know what he was talking about. As far as I can remember, it was the same lady that was always angry because Mazulhim did not treat her considerately?"

"There is no doubt about it," said the Sultana, "it is the same lady."

"One moment, please!" said the Sultan, "let us consider if it is the same lady. Why did he tell her . . . that which he told her? You see well that he was wrong. This lady is accustomed to have lovers, and consequently it was ridiculous to have told her that she ought to be astonished."

"Don't you see that he wanted to make her appear ridiculous?" asked the Sultana.

"Ah! that is another affair," the Sultan answered, "but why was I not informed about it? How could

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I guess it? Ah! he mocked at her,—I see it well, but what was the reason for his mockery? That is what I want to know.”

“And that is what Amanzai will surely tell you if you will let him continue.”

“Very well,” said the Sultan, “that which I said, you know it well, does not interest me a bit, I speak only for the sake of speaking. That amuses me, and as for me, I have no objection to conversation.”

Chapter XIV

WHICH CONTAINS FEWER FACTS THAN CONVERSATION

THE following day Amanzai continued:

“Thinking the way you do, madam,’ Nasses said to Zulica, you ought to be astonished to find yourself so sensitive.’

“‘No doubt about it,’ she answered, ‘and I assure you that it was quite a singular adventure in my life.’

“‘That you had loved?’ he asked, that does not astonish me. There are few women who try to avoid love, and that, I assure you, is what I cannot understand.’

“‘I cannot understand it either,’ she answered, ‘really, when I examine myself, I cannot realize how he could have pleased and seduced me.’

“‘Ah! Madam,’ he exclaimed in an interested voice, ‘how cruel our destiny is. You love a person who does not love you, and I love a person who will never love me. Always conscious of the unjust aversion which I know you have for me, I have not told you yet to what extent you have touched my heart.

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Perhaps my consideration, my constancy, my respect will disarm you.'

"'And perhaps you will treat me as Mazulhim did,' she answered quickly.

"'No,' he replied taking her by her hand, 'no, Zulica will always see herself worshipped as she deserves.'

"'But Mazulhim,' she said, 'used to tell me the same things. Why should I believe that you will not act in the same manner?'

"'Everything should have made you doubt the sincerity of his sentiments,' he replied. 'Mazulhim, inconstant, dissipated, never knew what it was to love. You can not ignore that he was more indiscreet and more faithless than we are permitted to be. It is nevertheless true, that faithless as he was, you could without being accused of too much pride have expected to hold him. The difficulty to please you; your charms; the sweet and rare pleasure one has to reign in a heart which hitherto did not belong to anybody, all that should have made you expect an eternal tenderness from him. That which would be a ridiculous vanity for others, should have been for you a matter of course.'

"'It is certain,' she replied modestly, 'that I deserved at least some consideration.'

"'Consideration? Is consideration enough to repay you for all your favours? You certainly demand

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more for your favours than is given to the least respected woman.'

"'But nevertheless,' answered Zulica, 'you see that I expected too much.'

"'If you will allow me to speak,' Nasses rejoined
' . . . '

"'You may,' she interrupted, 'you must know that all that has happened today, ties us with a bond of the most sincere friendship.'

"'Yes, madam,' he said with animation, 'and in a most tender fashion, is it to me, is it to Nasses, who was hated such a long time, that Zulica designs to promise her most sincere friendship?'

"'Yes, Nasses,' she answered, 'it is Zulica who admits her injustice, who is in despair over it, and who swears to repair it by the strongest sentiment and confidence.'

"Then she looked at him very obligingly. His face was pleasant and though less fashionable than Mazulhim, he was not less handsome than he.

"'What!' he cried out again, 'do you really promise to love me?'

"'Yes,' she answered, 'I will open my heart to you—read in it what I do, my most minute sentiments, my thoughts, everything will be known to you.'

"'Ah! Zulica,' he cried, throwing himself on his knees and kissing her hand with ardour, 'with what affection I would repay you for everything you do

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for me! With what pleasure I would submit to you all my thoughts! Sovereign lady of my heart, your orders only will regulate my conduct.'

"'Let us omit that,' she said smiling, 'and get up. I do not like to see you on your knees, let us return to that which you wanted to tell me.'

"He rose, seated himself near her, and holding her hand he continued,

"'I wish to ask you a few questions since you were kind enough to permit it. How could Mazulhim have pleased you? Through what enchantment could a woman so respected for her sentiments and conduct as you, find Mazulhim amiable? How could such a vain and impetuous man suit a woman who is as chaste and as modest as you are? I would not be astonished if women of his own character, frivolous, light-headed, dissipated women, women whom no love ever inspires, and who are always conquered by everybody whom they meet, that these women should be pleased with Mazulhim, does not astonish me,—but you!'

"'To be very candid with you, as I have promised,' answered Zulica, 'I will tell you frankly that I had no reasons to fear that Mazulhim would ever become dear to me. It is not that I thought myself incapable of weakness. Since I had no such cruel experience as I have had since, I did not know that one moment only is sufficient for the most virtuous

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woman to be able to commit the most fatal error. But reassured by my sentiments and by my general conduct and by my discharge of all duties prescribed to me, I flattered myself that this calm would be eternal.'

"'No doubt,' said Nasses very seriously, 'nothing is so dangerous to women than this security about which you speak.'

"'It is true,' she answered, 'a woman is never so liable to succumb than when she believes herself invincible. I lived in such a calm atmosphere when Mazulhim appeared to me. I could not tell all that he did in order to seduce me. All I know is that after a long resistance, my heart became moved, my head troubled. I felt that I was being overcome with emotion, so much more because I was not in the habit of experiencing it. Mazulhim, who knew better the nature of my trouble, took advantage of it and engaged me in proceedings, the consequences of which I did not foresee. Finally he brought me to such a pass that I came here. I believed and he promised it to me, that he only wanted to entertain me with more freedom than we could expect in a tumultuous society. I came here. His presence moved me more than I expected. All alone with him I found myself less strong to resist his desires, not being conscious of what I committed, I did not refuse him anything. Love finally seduced me to the very end.'

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"When she finished these words her eyes became wet with tears that she forced herself to shed. Nasses, who seemed seriously to share her sorrow, feigned to console her by telling her words that would cause her great despair. He chiefly dwelt maliciously on the fact that Mazulhim enjoyed her only for such a short time.

"It is not of course, that you lack the ability to make a man happy. At least one would so assume. It is, however, true that this ready inconstancy of Mazulhim would surely be disadvantageous to any woman other than you.'

"Zulica at these words assumed an expression that showed Nasses that she had nothing to reproach herself for on this score.

"It is well known,' continued Nasses, 'that men are unfortunate enough not to be able to enjoy even the most amiable woman for a long time without their desires diminishing; but they love at least three months, six weeks, fifteen days even. One could never imagine leaving a woman as quickly as he left you. This is so ridiculous, so horrible that it is impossible to imagine. Ah! Zulica!' he added, 'I repeat that you would find me more constant.'

"Zulica answered him that she was convinced of that, but she did not want to love any more. It would be a matter of indifference to her, whether men were constant or not; and she even wished for

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the sake of their sincere friendship that the love he averred for her were not a fact; and that she would be extremely sorry if he would entertain sentiments which she would not be able to reciprocate.

“‘Yes,’ answered Nasses sadly, ‘I understand well all that you have told me. I find in your character a firmness that I always feared in you, and that I can not help admiring though it makes me unhappy. Were you less estimable, I would complain less, and then, if I could only imagine, that, since you loved Mazulhim, it would not be impossible that you could love me too. This is an idea which one can have about all the women in the world without offense, but unfortunately you do not resemble anybody. I do not mean to draw an inference for the future, from your weakness in the past.’

“Zulica, who of course, laughed to herself at the false idea that Nasses seemed to have about her, assured him that he judged her justly and discussed at great length her fortunate manner of thinking with which she was endowed by nature, her disinclination to make contacts, and the frigidity in which she had in spite of the violent love that Mazulhim inspired in her, and which for other women of pleasure resulted in extreme passion.

“‘So much the worse for you, madam,’ Nasses said to her, ‘the more estimable you are, the more reasons you will have to complain. Your unsusceptibility

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will render your life unhappy. Mazulhim will always be present before your eyes. His humiliating way of leaving you will never escape your memory. It is a sort of punishment that will crush you in your solitude, and no dissipation, no pleasure will ever have the power to divert you.'

"'But what can I do,' she asked him, 'to free my spirit from this cruel vision? I agree with you that a new love would deliver me from thinking of Mazulhim, but without counting the misfortunes attached to new love, will I be able to make my heart yield to an attraction to such an extent as to heal it? No. Nasses, believe me, a woman that thinks the way I do, can not love twice.'

"'Tis a false idea!' he exclaimed, 'I knew women who loved more than six times, and nevertheless did not respect themselves the less. Besides, you are in such a cruel situation that, you ought to be judged outside of all accepted rules, for if people knew of your adventure, and would know that you had ten lovers at a time, they would still find you far from being culpable.'

"'They would surely have the kindness to overlook any others,' she answered laughing.

"'But no,' he retorted, 'one would find it simpler than you think. You understand very well that I did not tell you all this in order to suggest your tak-

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ing them, for one lover would be sufficient to make me die of sorrow.'

"'Ah!' said Zulica, in revery, 'We women are blamed when we love even with a constant passion, enduring and sincere, even then we can hardly escape contempt. Our misfortune is that what one considers a virtue in you is considered as a vice in us.'

"'Yes, formerly we thought so,' he answered, 'but customs have changed and our ideas have changed with them. Oh, no, if it is only the fear of being blamed that keeps you from it, you may yield to love.'

"'You are right, indeed,' she said, 'for why should others be concerned with what interests my heart. I do not see the slightest wrong in it.'

"'Nevertheless, having a mind that is able to distinguish the false from the true, you bow to, prejudices just like any one who cannot reason. So you are rather determined to deplore your weakness to Mazulhim all your life than to console yourself. You believe that a woman who thinks the way you do, should not love more than once. You surely sense that the principle on which you act, is not sound; you oppose reason in order to enjoy the noble pleasure of self-reproach, and apparently also to make people say that you always regret the loss of Mazulhim.'

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“‘But I hope,’ she answered, ‘that people will not talk about it.’

“‘I believe they will,’ he answered. ‘I know that you, madam, will not speak about it. It is certain that I will not discuss it either. The whole story does very little honor to Mazulhim, therefore, he will be obliged to keep silent. Nevertheless, if you will not change your point of view, everybody will know it.’

“‘But why?’ she persisted.

“‘Forsooth,’ he answered, ‘do you think that people who see you distressed will not try to fathom the reason for your affliction? And if they will obstinately try to penetrate you, will they not find the cause? Do you think that even Mazulhim, whose vanity is flattered by your sorrow, will resist the pleasure of informing people that it is his loss that you mourn?’

“‘That is true,’ she said, ‘but Nasses, does it depend on me to alleviate my grief?’

“‘No doubt about it,’ he answered, ‘it is all up to you. What are you regretting now? Mazulhim? If he would come back would you receive him?’

“‘I!’ she cried out, ‘ah, I would rather prefer to belong to the lowest man than to him.’

“‘As long as nothing that he would do could win your heart,’ he answered, ‘it is ridiculous to regret.’”

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"Tell me," said the Sultan, "have you much more stuff of this kind?"

"Yes, Sire," answered Amanzai.

"For Mahomet's sake, so much the worse," answered Schah-Baham, "this sort of discourse annoys me extremely. I assure you. If you could end it, or at least abridge it, you would do me a pleasure and I would not be unthankful."

"You are wrong to be dissatisfied," the Sultana said to him, "this conversation which bores you so much is an event by itself. It is not useless dissertation—it is it what one terms a dialogue?"

"Yes, Madam," he answered.

"This way of treating problems," she resumed, "is very agreeable. It gives a better and clearer picture of the characters that one uses in the scene, but it has its inconveniences. By seizing every nuance for example, one risks falling into the most minute details, which are not so important, and cause the impatience of the audience. To stop precisely at the right place, is more difficult than to create the story. The Sultan is wrong because he wants you to proceed quickly with your plot, but you would be unfair to those who have good taste. If your passion to speak carries you away, and if you are not able to sacrifice occasionally such things that seem to you, agreeable, you will not be able to spend time on details that would please us."

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"The Sultan is wrong!" cried Schah-Baham wrathfully, "Is that what you said? And I maintain that Amanzai is a prattler, who likes to deliver long speeches and consider himself a wit. You are shocked by it," he added turning toward Amanzai, "but I am only frank and if you would care to, I will wager, that you would admit that I am right."

"Yes, Sire," answered Amanzai, "and a courtier's complaisance aside, I must admit that for a long time people found in me the same shortcomings that Your Majesty reproaches me for."

"Then why don't you improve?" demanded Schah-Baham.

"Were it as easy to improve, as it is to admit," answered Amanzai, "Your Majesty would no longer have reason to reproach me."

"The force of Nasses' reasoning struck Zulica," he continued.

"'You are right, indeed,' she said to him, 'but it is not for Mazulhim that I sorrow. I deplore my weakness and that I gave myself up to a man who does not deserve me.'

"'I confess that the trick which he played on you should not endear him to you. However, if you would judge him without any prejudice, I am sure you will find agreeable traits for after all he has some.'

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"‘If you want to know,’ she answered in disdain, ‘first of all he is not even well-built.’

"‘I do not know anybody who is more graceful than he,’ Nasses replied, ‘he has the most beautiful head, well-shaped legs, a noble and poised manner, a vivid, quick, and entertaining mind.’

"‘Yes,’ she answered, ‘I do not deny that he is a bit handsome, but after all, nothing more. Besides, I want to assure you that he is far from being as entertaining as people believe him to be. Between us, he is a very conceited fop.’

"‘In a man who was fortunate enough to have pleased you, I can overlook some pride,’ interrupted Nasses.

"‘But Nasses,’ she answered, ‘it is quite peculiar to hear such words from a man who pretends to love me and who apparently wants me to believe him.’

"‘Odious as Mazulhim is to you at present,’ answered Nasses, ‘he is still less odious than I am to you; and I believe that I would risk more in speaking to you of a man whom you could never love, than to talk about one whom you have loved so tenderly. You are still so strongly interested in him that as soon as I pronounce his name your eyes become suffused with tears, and even now you weep, which you vainly try to conceal. . . . Oh, stop your tears, amiable Zulica,’ he said with tenderness that would become disastrous.

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“Zulica, who for some time had not felt any desire to cry, could not listen to this discourse without believing that she ought to shed a few more tears. Nasses, who enjoyed the comedy that he made her play for his entertainment, left her for some time in her affected sorrow. In the meanwhile, in order not to lose any precious time entertained himself by kissing her breasts which were quite generously exposed. For a long enough time she did not even deign to notice what he was doing and only after permitting him entire liberty, did she find fault with his conduct.

“‘You do not even think, Nasses,’ she said keeping her handkerchief in front of her eyes all the time, ‘how your liberties pain me.’

“‘I believe it,’ he answered, ‘won’t you consider it as a favour. Look at me, so that I should be able to see your eyes.’

“‘No,’ she answered, ‘they are too tearful to be beautiful.’

“‘Without your tears,’ he answered, ‘you would seem to me less beautiful. Listen to me, the state in which I see you afflicts me. I absolutely want to see you delivered from it. I proved to you already the necessity of love and now I will prove to you insofar as it is in my power, that you ought to love me.’

“‘I doubt,’ she answered, ‘whether you will succeed.’

“‘That we will see,’ he replied, ‘first of all you

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admit that you hate me without reason. That is the kind of an injustice that can only be repaired by loving me furiously.' She smiled. 'Besides, I love you and, though you can easily inspire anybody with more love than you desire, you will never find a man who would be more disposed to love you as tenderly as you deserve. Whether we men are right or wrong, we generally have a bad opinion about women. We are convinced that women are neither faithful nor constant, and on this premise we think we do not owe them either constancy or fidelity. Consequently, passionate love is seen but little. Before we decide to take a woman, we must first learn that she deserves more estimable sentiments than we usually accord her; to examine her character, and the way she lives and thinks, and to regulate according to that, the degree of esteem we owe them . . .'

"'Well,' she interrupted, 'Who hinders you from doing this?'

"'You are mocking me, madam,' he answered severely, 'This sort of study requires time while we are engaged in it; a woman usually anticipates us with inconstancy and this is such a cruel accident to us that in order not to expose ourselves to it we desert the woman before ascertaining whether she deserves to be loved any longer.'

"'But what deductions do you conclude from all of this?' she asked.

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“‘That is it,’ he answered, ‘but will that handkerchief always remain before your eyes?’

“‘Didn’t I look at you?’ she asked him.

“‘Not enough,’ he answered, ‘I do not want to see this handkerchief any more or I will hate you, if it is possible, as much as you hated me.’

“‘She looked at him smiling and quite tenderly.

“‘Continue,’ she said to him, leaning against him.

“‘Yes,’ he answered, pressing her closely in his arms, ‘I will continue, you must not doubt it. All I have seen here regarding you was worth the study that I spoke of. You have acquired all my esteem and consequently you have doubled my love for you. Any one else could not adore you as much as I do. He would see nothing but your charms and he could never be sure of the beauty of your soul; for nothing could prove to him the extent of your delicate sentiments. You will surely answer, that he would learn of them by observing your conduct. Oh, madam, do you think that a dissipated and light-headed man, a man without any morals, especially in reference to women, who finds no other certain way to condemn them than by refusing to study them; do you think that such a man would notice anything that would gain his esteem; or that he would not accuse you of affectation in order that you parade certain virtues that you do not possess at all?’

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“‘Yes, I believe so,’ she answered, ‘nothing is more sensible than your remarks.’

“‘Nasses, in order to thank her for praising him, wanted to kiss her hand, but as her mouth was nearer, he thought it would be more proper to express his gratitude by kissing her lips.

“‘Ah! Nasses,’ she said to him softly, ‘we shall quarrel.’

“‘So you see clearly,’ he continued without answering her, ‘that I am the man who respects you most, and who has the best reasons in the world to do it; and therefore I should be the only man whom you could love.’

“‘No,’ she answered, ‘love is too dangerous.’

“‘That is an old maxim from the opera, so trite and dull that it is nowadays not even used in a madrigal; and which after all, should not prevent you from loving me, I assure you.’

“‘It is not this that prevents me from it,’ she answered, ‘. . . But why do you ask me for love? Did I not promise you friendship?’

“‘Of course,’ he answered, ‘it is a generous effort on your part. It is certain that did I not adore you, your friendship would suffice; and perhaps even less than that; but the sentiments that I have for you can only be rewarded by the most tender affection; and I swear that I will not neglect anything that will result in all the ardour that I require from you.’

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“And I also declare to you that I will not neglect anything in order to defend myself from that.”

“Ah!” he said, ‘you want to protect yourself from me . . . that is charming, that proves that you think I am dangerous. You are right. Because I love so passionately, I am the most dangerous of men. Had I to deal with a less estimable person, I would not be so sure of my victory.’

“Nevertheless,” she answered, ‘the more estimable I am, the more I shall resist.’

“Quite the contrary,” he retorted, ‘it is difficult only to conquer coquettes; one can easily persuade them that they are amiable but one dare not touch them however; but the easiest conquest is that of a reasonable woman.’

“I would never believe it,” she said.

“And nothing is more true,” he answered, ‘You can not doubt that I love you. Answer me, do you doubt it? Be frank!’

“I have been so foolishly credulous that, I believe it will require a long time to persuade me of it.”

“But Mazulhim aside, what do you think?” he insisted.

“She answered him that she believed that he did not hate her. He was so persistent that she finally admitted of being assured that he loved her.

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“‘And do you still find me objectionable?’ he continued.

“‘Objectionable?’ she echoed, ‘of course not. I would like to be indifferent, but I would not like to be unjust.’

“‘You believe that I love you,’ he exclaimed, ‘you do not hate me and you still imagine that you will continue to resist me. You with your honest character. And you flatter yourself that you could make me unhappy, while all your desires are in my favour. That you will arrange a time to yield to me, but that will not happen until you believe that you can give yourself without endangering propriety? No, Zulica, no. I have a better opinion of you, than you have of yourself. You are not so false as to drive a lover desperate. You do not know the perfidious art of leading me from one favour to another until the one that would forever satisfy and calm my desire. The moment when I will have attained you I will die of pleasure in your arms; and this charming mouth,’ he added with ecstasy, ‘. . .’

“That is fine, that is fine!” interrupted the Sultan, “you have delivered me from a great pain. I swear that I began to fear this would never happen. Ah! this Zulica, this foolish creature, with her caprices.”

“Indeed,” said the Sultana, “I must admit that it is impossible to wait too long for such favours. What?

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To resist for a whole hour? That is without precedent!"

"The truth of the matter is," said the Sultan, "that it annoyed me, as if it had lasted fifteen days; and if Amanzai had postponed this ecstatic moment any longer, I would have died of chagrin and melancholy. But before my demise, it would have cost him his life, and I would have taught him what it means to make a Sultan perish of boredom."

Chapter XV

WHICH WILL NOT AMUSE THOSE WHOM THE PRECEDING ONES HAVE BORED

“**B**Y the silence that reigned at this moment, (which yesterday so contented Your Majesty)” Amanzai continued the next day, “I judged that Nasses prevented Zulica from speaking, and that she prevented him from continuing.

“‘Ah, Nasses,’ she cried out as loudly as she could, ‘Nasses, consider what you are doing! If you love me . . .’

“The more Nasses feared her reproaches, the less opportunity he gave her to make them. I never realized until this instant how important it is to be stubborn with women.

“‘But listen to me,’ said Zulica, ‘Nasses, listen to me! Do you want me to detest you?’

“Her murmurs, interrupted, feebly articulated, lost their force and had no effect. Zulica saw clearly that it was useless to speak to a man who was lost in ecstasy, and to whom the most complimentary

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things in the world might be said in vain. What could she do? Exactly what she did. After having taken precautions against the enterprises which Nasses attempted with all possible rashness, and putting herself in this respect outside of any fear, she patiently waited until he would be able to listen to the discourse which she had ready on his impertinences. In the meanwhile, whether he wanted to obtain her pardon more easily or whether he was really so troubled by Zulica, Nasses set her free, but fell again on her breast in such dejection that he could not have been conscious of anything except his own condition.

“Zulica was embarrassed again, for what was the use of speaking to anyone who was not in a fit condition to listen? At this very instant, only the fact that Nasses was apparently too unconscious to do anything rendered her forced silence less painful. She nevertheless attempted to free herself entirely from his arms, but she failed. When he recovered his senses, how tender he seemed. His glances strayed upon Zulica with such affection! He languidly closed his eyes, uttered such profound sighs, that she, far from being able to be as angry with him as she wanted, and in spite of her natural insensibility, began to be moved and to share his transport. This virtuous person would have been lost had Nasses noticed how moved she was. Finally Nasses came to himself, and seized Zulica’s hand.

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“‘Nasses,’ she said to him angrily, ‘is that the way to make me love you?’

“Nasses apologized for the violence of his passion, which did not permit him to control himself. Zulica maintained that sincere love is always accompanied by respect and that such very unguarded manners as his, are applied only to women who are not respected. He on his part, maintained, that only women who arouse desires are shown so little respect and that nothing could better prove his admiration than his transport, which she so obstinately condemned.

“‘If I respected you less,’ he continued, ‘I would have asked you to allow me that which I just ravished, but as trifling as the favours were that I took, I knew you would refuse them. Had I been sure to receive them from you, I would not have thought of using force. The better an opinion one has about a woman, the more one is forced to be guilty of too much impudence towards her. Nothing is more true than this.’

“‘I do not believe a word of it,’ answered Zulica, ‘but even if it were true, there is always an established rule that one does not commence a love-confession in such a singular manner.’

“‘Assuming that I did attack you too vigorously, as you say,’ he replied, ‘this would be one more attention for which you should have thanked me as complimentary.’

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“‘No,’ she answered impatiently, ‘you have such odd ideas; that have not their equal.’

“‘It is very pleasant,’ he answered, ‘that these ideas which you consider bizarre, are entirely based upon reason. That what you reproach me for, is so true, that I will surely make you feel it for you not only have a sense of wit, but quite a fine one, upon which I congratulate you, as such wit is quite a rare quality in a woman.’

“‘The compliment does not soften me,’ she answered harshly, ‘and I care very little for it. I assure you.’

“‘It is really very unpleasant to me,’ he answered, ‘to see you so little affected by the lovely things I am telling you.’

“‘In one word, Sir,’ she interrupted, ‘in order to accomplish something, one has to be persuasive, at least. You ought to be glad that I am telling you this.’

“‘I understand you, madame,’ he answered, ‘you want me to ruin your reputation in the world. Ah well! I will do it. I wanted you to love me, so that it would not arouse any comment, but since you do not like my delicate behaviour, I will pay you public attention, madame. Everybody will know that I love you and I will spare no tenderness to inform the world about my sentiments toward you.’

“‘But what are you talking about?’ she asked, ‘you

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are a strange man. It is because you respect me that you treat me impertinently, which I ought never forgive; it is because you are so extremely solicitous for me that you abuse me as if I were a woman who deserves no respect in the world! You are doing a thousand condemnable things and I am the one who is wrong. Tell me, please, how do you explain all this?’

“‘Were you more experienced in love,’ he answered, ‘you would spare me all these explanations. I will tell you, however, that though I will make you feel uneasy, I would rather prefer to give you lessons on this subject, than to find you so instructed that no lesson would be required. Do you know that a woman is rendered less unhappy by the favours that she grants to her lover, than by the time that she makes him await them. Do you believe that I could love you and at the same time be unhappy in my attentions toward you, without the affair becoming public? I will become sad and everybody will understand that your severity is the reason for my melancholy. Finally, it must come to it, you will render me happy. Do you think that, in spite of all my care to control myself, your eyes, my eyes and our affectionate familiarity will not disclose our secret?’

“Zulica’s astonishment and silence seemed to prove that she agreed with Nasses.

“‘You see well,’ he continued, ‘that when I urge

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you to render me happy immediately, I do it rather for your sake than for my own. If you follow my advice, if you will spare me tortures, you will avoid the turbulence which always accompanies the beginning of a passion. Besides, in the situation that we are now, I would not be able to show you any love without exposing it to the world, but by mutual agreement we will disclose to the world our affairs in a way that we will find convenient. Convinced that you detest me, people will never imagine that you so rapidly passed from hatred to love. Then you will find it easy to bring about a reconciliation gradually. At court or at the Crown Princess, where we shall be together, you will take advantage of any opportunity to render me some politeness. Do not worry about this opportunity, I will find it for you. I shall promptly answer your courteous overture and will loudly express my hope that you should no longer dislike me. I will even ask one of our mutual friends that you should allow me to see you. You will agree to that; I will meet you; then I will come to see you again. I will praise your company as charming and will proclaim my regret to have been deprived of it for such a long time. Nothing more will be needed to justify my eagerness. It will seem so simple and natural and thus we will enjoy our love more, by making a secret of it.'

"No," she answered dreaming, 'if I should render

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you happy so promptly, I would fear your inconstancy too much. I would not mind basing our relationship upon respect, confidence, and friendship—these are not found so frequently. I will tell you more; I would not even object to love, if the lover would not require more than merely an avowal of tenderness.’

“‘What you demand,’ he affectionately answered, ‘is more difficult of accomplishment with you than with any other woman. I must confess, that though you would grant me ever so little consideration, I should be more flattered by it, than by obtaining everything from another woman. But, Zulica, believe me, I adore you; you love me—make happy the man who has the strongest passion for you.’

“‘If you would know how to limit your desires,’ she answered with emotion, ‘and if the granted favours would not give you the right to demand more, one could try to make you less unhappy, but . . .’

“‘No, Zulica,’ he interrupted quickly, ‘you will be satisfied with my obedience.’

“At these perilous words, Zulica leaned nonchalantly against him. He threw himself upon her and took abundant advantage of the favours that were accorded to him.

“‘Ah, Zulica,’ he said to her tenderly a moment later, ‘Must I continue to owe these sweet moments

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only to your tolerance? And don't you desire them to be as enjoyable for you as they are for me?"

X "Zulica ~~did not answer~~, but Nasses did not complain of this. Soon he transmitted into Zulica's soul all the fire that consumed him. He forgot the promise that he gave her and she also forgot what she required from him. She did complain, but so softly that her complaint was more a tender sigh than a reproach. Seeing to what extent he seduced her, Nasses thought that he must not lose those precious moments.

"'Ah, Nasses,' she said to him in a stifled voice, 'if you do not love me, to what a plight you would reduce me!'

"Even if Zulica's fears of Nasses's love were as true and sincere as they appeared to be, Nasses transports would have dissipated them. Also certain that she would not be in doubt of his ardour very much longer, he thought it unwise to waste any time in answering her, which he could employ to better advantage in consoling her more effectively, than by the most touching discourse. Zulica was not offended by his silence and even in a short time, for often a trifle makes one lose sight of the most important things, she seemed to forget her fears which she dared not entertain, without offending Nasses. Other ideas, sweeter ones, without doubt, supplanted them. She wished to speak, but could utter no more than a few inarticulate words, which expressed only the ex-

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citement of her soul. When he had done, Nasses threw himself on his knees.

“‘Ah, leave me,’ she said pushing him away slightly.

“‘What,’ he answered in astonishment, ‘am I so unfortunate as to displease you? Is it possible that I gave you any reason to complain?’

“‘If I do not complain, it does not mean that I have no reason to,’ she answered.

“‘And why do you continue to object?’ he asked, ‘should you not be tired of such resistance?’

“‘I must admit,’ she answered, ‘that many women would have succumbed sooner than I, but nevertheless, I feel that I should have resisted longer.’ And she looked at him with a troubled and languorous gaze which betrays and excites desires.

“‘Do you love me?’ Nasses asked her as tenderly as if he himself really loved her.

“‘Ah, Nasses,’ she exclaimed, ‘what pleasure would it give you to hear a confession which has already been exposed by your ardour? Did you leave me anything to tell you on this subject?’

“‘Yes, Zulica,’ he answered, ‘without this charming confession that I demand of you, I could not be happy. Without this confession, I can only regard myself as a ravisher. Ah! Do you want that I should reproach myself so cruelly?’

“‘Yes, Nasses,’ she admitted sighing, ‘I love you.’

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"Nasses was ready to thank Zulica, when Mazul-him's slave came in to serve supper, Nasses groaned—"

"By heaven, I knew it," interrupted the Sultan, "You see what these slaves are. You never see them except when you do not want them. Why did he not come in when Zulica and Nasses bored me so much? He comes in exactly at a time to interrupt, just when I listened with the utmost pleasure."

"Indeed," said the Sultana, "I was astonished at your long silence."

"I did not want to disturb them; I strongly desired to know what would be the end. I am very much content," he added turning to Amanzai, "that is what one may call a touching situation. I still have tears in my eyes."

"What?" exclaimed the Sultana, "that has caused you tears?"

"Why not?" he retorted, "it was quite touching, or I am greatly mistaken. This was to me a bit of a tragedy and if you did not cry, it is because you have an unsympathetic nature." When he finished these words, which he considered a deadly affront against the Sultana, he commanded very complacently that Amanzai continue.

"Nasses groaned because he was interrupted," Amanzai took up the thread of his story, "it was not because he was in love, but he was overwhelmed with an impatience and ardour which, having nothing

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to do with love, yet resembling it, and which women regard as symptoms of a true passion, either because they find it necessary with us to pretend that belief, or they indeed do not know any better. Zulica, who attributed the impatience which she noticed in Nasses to her own charms only, was very appreciative, but in order to keep up the character of a reserved person, she pressed his hand as a sign to be circumspect in the presence of the slave, and they seated themselves at the table.

“After supper . . .”

“Patience, patience, if you please,” interrupted Schah-Baham, “I want, if that causes you no inconvenience, to see them at supper. Above everything, I like to hear conversation held at the table.”

“Your mind is singularly inconsistent,” said the Sultana, “You became at innumerable occasions, impatient because of the discourses that were necessary to the plot and now you demand some chatter that has absolutely nothing to do with the story and that will only lengthen it.”

“Well,” answered the Sultan, “if I want to be inconsistent is there anybody here who can forbid me? Look here! I want it understood that the Sultan may reason just as he pleases, that all my ancestors had the same privilege which you now wish to deny me; that no woman however witty, dared to prevent them from speaking as they wished, and that even

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my grand-mother with whom, I think, you will not have the audacity to compare yourself, had never contradicted my grand-father Schah-Riar, son of Schah-Mamoun, who engendered Schah-Techni, who—all of which I am telling you,” he continued more moderately, “rather to show you that I know my genealogy than to provoke any one, and you, Amanzai, may continue.”

“‘It is quite singular,’ said Zulica as soon as she seated herself at the table, ‘how an important event of our life may be brought about. If one would say to a woman, ‘This evening you will furiously love a man of whom you not only never thought, but whom you even hated, she would not believe it. Nevertheless, such a situation can happen.’

“‘I can answer that,’ explained Nasses, ‘I would be very sorry if that did not happen. Furthermore, it is true, that nothing is more common than to see a woman fall violently in love with a man whom she saw for the first time or whom she indeed hated. That is even how the most violent passions are born.’

“‘Nevertheless,’ she answered, ‘you will find many people who maintain that there is no such a thing as love at first sight.’

“‘Do you know who are those who maintain that? Young men who as yet know nothing of life or women who have prudish minds and cold hearts. These indolent women who take all possible precautions

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against passion and who become inflamed only by degrees, cause one to pay quite dearly for their heart, in which one finds more remorse than pleasure, and even this pleasure one cannot enjoy perfectly.'

"'Well,' she answered, 'those women, ridiculous as they are, still have sympathies and I myself, up to a short time ago, used to think as they do.'

"'And do you know,' he replied, 'that you are just as prejudiced as they are?'

"'Perhaps,' she answered, 'but I know that I have one prejudice less, for I believe in spontaneous passion.'

"'As far as I know,' he said, 'such occurrences are quite common. I even know a woman who is usually subject to these three or four times daily.'

"'Ah, Nasses,' she exclaimed, 'that is not possible.'

"'Even if you would simply say that it is not ordinary,' he answered, 'you would still be mistaken and that a woman who has the misfortune to be born susceptible, (if it is a misfortune,) can not at any moment be responsible for herself? Supposing that you would feel a necessity to love, what would you do?'

"'I would love you,' she answered.

"'Well! Let us suppose now,' he continued, 'that a woman feels a necessity to love three or four men a day.'

"'I would be very sorry for her,' she said.

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“Right! I agree with you, but what would you want her to do? That she run away, you will tell me? But one cannot go very far away in one’s room. After having walked for a certain time, one becomes tired and has to sit down. The man who has impressed you is constantly before your eyes. The desires are intensified by the resistance she exerted and the necessity to love, far from being diminished, becomes more consuming.’

“‘But to love four!’ she answered dreaming.

“‘If the number shocks you,’ he replied, ‘I will deduct two.’

“‘Ah, that seems plausible and even more possible,’ she said.

“‘And what a fuss you made about loving only one!’

“‘Hush,’ she said to him smiling, ‘I can not imagine where you got all your arguments, nor where I find all my answers.’

“‘From nature,’ he answered, ‘You are genuine, not artificial. You love me enough not to wish to conceal your thoughts from me and I esteem you so much the more, as there are few women who have such a truthful character.’

“‘All these words and many others equally uninteresting lasted till dessert was served. As soon as they were left alone, he rose impulsively and throwing himself at Zulica’s feet, said,

“‘Do you love me?’



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"'Have I not assured you of that often enough?' she answered languorously.

"'Heavens!' he exclaimed getting up and taking her in his arms, 'can I hear it too often and can you prove it to me too much?'

"'Ah, Nasses,' she answered relaxing in his arms and falling on the divan, 'How you abuse my weakness.'

"'The devil!' said the Sultan, 'what did she want him to do? That is pretty good! I think she would have been quite angry if he had left her in peace. No! Women certainly are very singular! They never know what they want. When one is with a woman one never knows . . .'"

"'What a temper,'" interrupted the Sultana, "what a torrent of epigrams. What have we women done to you?"

"'No,'" answered the Sultan, "I said it without any anger. One need not be angry at them to find them ridiculous."

"'You are caustic beyond measure,'" the Sultana said to him, 'and I fear that you, who have always detested persons of wit, will become an incorrigible one yourself.'

"'It was Zulica who made me angry,'" answered the Sultan. "I do not like affectations."

"'Your Majesty need not waste so much indignation against her,'" Amanzai tried to comfort him, "for she will not continue them much longer."

Chapter XVI

WHICH CONTAINS A DISSERTATION WHICH WILL NOT BE TO EVERY- ONE'S TASTE

AFTER having uttered the few words which produced such a bad impression on Your Majesty, Zulica remained silent.

“‘Do you think,’ Nasses asked her finally, ‘that Mazulhim loved you more than I do?’

“‘He praised me more,’ she answered, ‘but it seems to me that you love me more.’

“‘I do not want to give you any reason to doubt my tenderness,’ he answered. ‘Yes, Zulica, you will soon learn how Mazulhim’s sentiments were inferior to mine.’

“‘What!’ she replied, ‘what are you . . .’

“Nasses did not permit her to finish and she did not complain of having been interrupted.

“‘Ah, Nasses!’ she cried out tenderly, ‘how sincerely you deserve to be loved.’

“Nasses answered this praise only as a man can, who is aware that he would be less praised at present,

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if it were not to encourage him for the future. He had affected Zulica, and now he succeeded in astonishing her. She showed him consideration and even respect, which in view of the motive that prompted him to obtain them, became extremely pleasant and especially complimentary to him, as they were not the results of gratification, as is usually the case with love. Nasses, quite content with himself, thought that he ought to interrupt for a moment the flow of admiration that he obtained from Zulica. His conquest over, her yielding meant nothing to him. He knew her too well to be flattered, and the favours that she had shown him, far from diminishing his contempt for her, only augmented it.

"He felt for her that kind of profound aversion which simply makes impossible any dissimulation or regard toward the people who inspire this hatred, and being in this frame of mind, he thought he could not show her too soon the impression that her conduct created upon his soul.

"‘So you find,’ he asked her, ‘that I do not praise you as much as Mazulhim did?’

"‘Yes,’ she answered, ‘but I find at the same time that you know better how to love than he.’

"‘That is a distinction which I can not understand,’ he replied, ‘what meaning do you actually attach to the word love?’

"‘The one that it has,’ she answered, ‘I know only

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one meaning, and that is the one I am referring to; but you, who seem to love me so well, why do you ask me what love is?’

“‘If I ask you, it does not mean that I can not feel it, but as everybody defines this sentiment according to his own nature, I would like to know how you particularly understand it. You, who say that I love you better than Mazulhim does. I can not see the difference that you make between me and him, unless you apprise me of his fashion of loving.’

“‘His heart is worn out,’ she answered, forcing a blush.

“‘His heart is worn out?’ he repeated, ‘according to me this expression does not determine anything. His heart becomes exhausted, I am sure, because of a passion that lasts too long; but this was not the case with Mazulhim and you, as you were an entirely new object for his eyes and his imagination. Consequently, that what you told me is not what I want to know.’

“‘I will not say more than that,’ she answered, ‘I know only that there are few persons who are less fit to love than he is; at least I think so, and do not ask me any more, for I have nothing more to say on this subject.’

“‘Ah, I understand you,’ he answered, ‘but nevertheless, I do not recognize Mazulhim by your portrayal of him.’

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“‘But it seems to me that I did not tell you anything about him,’ she replied.

“‘Oh, pardon me!’ he said, ‘it is easy to understand what is meant by reproaching a man for having a heart that is worn-out. It is a reserved and circumspect expression; but it is easily understood. I am surprised though, that you complain of him on this score.’

“‘I do not complain, Nasses,’ she answered, ‘but as you wanted to know what I think, I will tell you it is true; that I was surprised at him . . . It is astonishing; I found him to be what I least expected.’

“‘Oh! I believe you.’

“‘No doubt,’ she answered ironically, ‘experience enlightened me in this regard.’

“‘Experience, or no experience,’ he answered, ‘but it is known what a lover should be in order to be able to satisfy him fully. On this matter there is an established tradition, but I repeat once more, that you surprise me, because Mazulhim . . .’

“‘Well, Nasses,’ she interrupted, ‘it is a situation that we cannot imagine.’

“‘I cannot recover from my surprise,’ he answered, ‘I know things about him that are incredible, extravagant . . .’

“‘That is apparently what he himself told you,’ she said.

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“No, he did not tell me anything, and I will tell you more, he is even very modest in that regard.”

“As to modesty,” she answered, “he has none at all, but sometimes perhaps he does himself justice.”

“Madam, madam,” he said, “such a brilliant reputation as Mazulhim’s must be based upon a foundation and you can never make me believe that a man of whom all women of Agra think so highly should be of so little avail.”

“Eh, do you think,” she answered, “that a woman dissatisfied with Mazulhim would tell anybody the reason for her dissatisfaction?”

“Absolutely,” he answered, “she would not tell it to everybody, but she would confide it to somebody. The fact that you tell it to me is the best proof. I know that I owe your confession to the nature of our relationship, but Mazulhim loved other women too. After him, they loved others, to whom they probably confided their adventures. There are in Agra more than a thousand women who did not show any resistance to Mazulhim and consequently there must have been four thousand men who knew the exact truth about him, and you think that a secret of that nature would be buried between an offended woman and a betrayed man? That is not probable! No, Madam, no, a man as Mazulhim appeared to you, could not impose himself on people such a long time. I will tell you more. You know

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Telmisse? She is surely no longer young nor beautiful. It is not more than ten days ago that Mazulhim showed her all possible esteem; and merited and obtained all that he deserved from her. That is a fact. Telmisse told it to everybody who wanted to listen. She is not the kind of a person who gratuitously speaks highly of anybody, and we do not know any woman whose approbation would do us greater honour, and would be more difficult to obtain than hers. Can you have a bad opinion about Mazulhim after this?’

“‘No,’ she answered coldly, ‘he is incomparable. It is undoubtedly my fault that I did not find him so,’ she added with a disdainful smile.

“‘I am not ready to consider it in that light,’ he answered, ‘but it is certain that there is something in your attitude that is not conceivable. Besides, you may not believe it, but if I were a woman, men like Mazulhim would please me infinitely more than others.’

“‘I think,’ she answered, ‘that their impotence would not be a sufficient reason to avoid them or to desert them, but I must admit that I do not see any reason why they should be preferred on that account.’

“‘Because they love better,’ he said, ‘they alone realize what it is to be considerate and kind. The more they are loved the more they try to deserve it; necessarily submissive, they are better slaves than

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lovers. Sensual and delicate, they can invent a thousand attentions. To them love owes the most mysterious sensations. If they happen to be in ecstasy, it is not due to blind emotion, (which is not flattering to woman) that they owe the ardour which fills the heart. It is her charms alone that subjugate nature. Can she ever have a pleasanter and more real triumph?

“‘You do not astonish me at all,’ said Zulica to him, ‘you certainly have perverse opinions.’

“‘Your mind is too sound,’ he answered, ‘to consider my remarks perverse and I know that more than one woman . . .’

“‘Let us stop that,’ she interrupted, ‘I never discussed anything that does not interest me. Besides, it would benefit Mazulhim more than you, to try to convince me of that view.’

“‘She is right,’ said the Sultan, “When will she leave?”

“How impatient you are,” said the Sultana.

“It is not that I am bored,” explained the Sultan, “but in spite of the fact that this is very diverting, I think I would prefer to hear something else. I am like that.”

“What do you mean by that?” asked the Sultana.

“Don’t you understand?” he asked. “I am quite explicit. When I say, ‘I am like that’ I mean that sometimes a certain pleasure does not prevent one

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from desiring another. I will express myself more in detail."

"There are many nuances that are lost in an explanation," replied the Sultana, "we understand you. Do you want anything else?"

"Yes," replied the Sultan, "I want Amanzai to finish his story."

"In that case, he will have to continue," answered the Sultana.

"Quite the contrary," answered Schah-Baham, "it seems to me that if he will stop right here, he will finish it much sooner, but as I am complaisance itself, I will permit him to continue, but on the condition that I may change my mind."

"And furthermore," continued Zulica, 'you will oblige me if you will stop speaking about Mazulhim.'

"Very gladly," he answered, 'it is that worn-out heart about which you spoke, that drew us into this useless discussion, and I would reproach myself for inciting your anger, if I were not aware that my affection and the desire to know why you thought I loved you better than Mazulhim, made me do it. The more complimentary the sentiments that you show me, the less you ought to blame my curiosity which is caused by my love.'

"No," she answered sadly, 'it seems to me that during the last few moments you do not love me as

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much as you did. I do not know why I think so, but I cannot help it, and this notion worries me.'

"'I am enchanted to know that you have this idea,' answered Nasses, 'that kind of anxiety, which has no sound basis, yet which does not cause less torture, can only be experienced by a heart as tender as it is delicate. You are unjust to me, but this injustice proves to me how much you love me, and consequently you are more dear to me. Do not be uneasy, amiable Zulica,' he continued. 'Heavens! how happy I am to banish your fears. Zulica! Charming Zulica! Ah! for the sake of our happiness, those fears must never return.'

"After saying these words he took Zulica in his arms and overwhelmed her with the most tender caresses.

"'What ecstasy you give me,' she exclaimed. 'I feel all your raptures passing into my heart. They fill it; they disturb it; they melt it! Ah, Nasses! What joy it is to owe you this sweetness which I have never before experienced . . . You only! . . . Yes, only you! . . . But, Nasses,—ah, you cruel!—'

"Though Zulica did not stop speaking, I could not hear what she said."

"It is probably because she spoke so softly?" suggested the Sultan.

"It is probable," concurred Amanzai.

"And then it is obvious that you did not lose much

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by not hearing their conversation, for, unless I am mistaken, there was no sense in her remarks. At least, I did not understand a word of it."

"I agree with you, Sire," answered Amanzai, "nothing could be less clear. Meanwhile, either Nasses understood her perfectly, or he was not at that moment more sensible than she, for he said the same things she did."

"Didn't I tell you?" exclaimed the Sultan, "these people had no sense at all."

"As soon as Nasses and Zulica became more reasonable," Amanzai continued, "Zulica looked at Nasses tenderly.

"'You are charming, Nasses,' she said, 'why did I not love you any sooner?'

"'You have less to complain of than I, whom every instant convinces, that I did not commence to live until the moment that you began to love me. How sorry I am for Mazulhim when I think that he closed his eyes to such charms. What! Zulica, in this place where we are now, in this very place which is as dear to me now because of the favours you granted me, as it was hideous to me on account of the favours you accorded Mazulhim; on this very spot, this ungrateful man did not blush to love other women and to renounce his fidelity to you. What genii, what jinn was so mindful of my good fortune as to inspire Mazulhim, after he was insensible to your charms,

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to have chosen me to convey to you his perfidy? Ah, Zulica, it would have been my misfortune if he had been faithful to you, or if some other than I . . .’

“‘Stop,’ interrupted Zulica majestically, ‘if he had been faithful to me, I would not have loved anybody else but him; but it took no one less than Nasses to banish him from my heart.’

“‘Since you chose me,’ he answered, ‘I think that I was really the only one that could have pleased you; but when I think of the position in which I found you and what an unscrupulous man, sent by Mazulhim might have demanded from you, and at what price he would have consented to remain silent, I cannot help trembling.’

“‘I do not see why,’ she answered, ‘Not wanting to give anything, it would be of indifference to me whether he would demand anything or not.’

“‘You could not be responsible for it,’ he said, ‘there are certain dangerous situations for women and the one in which I found you, was perhaps, the most terrible . . .’

“‘As you please,’ she interrupted, ‘but I want you to understand that it is far less cruel to a woman with sentiments to be abandoned by a man who loves her, than it is to surrender to a man whom she does not love.’

“‘No doubt about it,’ he answered, ‘but it is a terrible thing to be surprised in this kind of a house.

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I do not know what I would do if I were a woman and that would happen to me; but it seems to me that I would be very content if the man who surprised me here would be kind enough not to say a word about it.'

"'You would be glad,' she mocked, 'apparently it is all very simple and I too would be glad if the man who discovered me here would say nothing about it. Asinine words! One must lose one's mind to say this. Do you think that an honest man, in order to keep still, requires such things that you imagine? And do you really believe that men make such propositions to women of certain quality?'

"'Certainly, yes,' he answered. 'Every woman who is seen in such a house admits that she has a susceptible nature. Compromising deductions are drawn from it and usually the more amiable the woman is the less generous is the man.'

"'Oh, that is only a story,' answered Zulica, 'only attraction, and I would say, only a strong attraction can excuse a woman from surrendering and I do not believe, regardless of what people think about it, that there is any woman who would pay so dearly for the discretion which she requires, and the honour . . .'

"'Good,' he interrupted, 'do you think that a woman ever fears to sacrifice her honor for the sake of her reputation?'

"'I would not do it,' she answered, 'and I do not

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know any situation, no matter how terrible it would be, which would induce me to accord to a man, that which my heart wished to refuse him.'

"'One must be very delicate,' he answered, 'to make this kind of distinction and to stop there; while expecting to win a woman's heart, one tries first to compromise her, so that she might deem it wiser to surrender, and often enough, she is very content to close the incident in that way.'

"'I begin to understand you,' she said to him. 'You want to make me feel that you owe my surrender to the situation in which you found me; rather than think well of me. Where is my happiness with which I flattered myself?' she added weeping. 'Ah, Nasses, it was not from you that I expected such cruel conduct.'

"'But, Zulica,' he answered, 'do you think that I have forgotten the resistance that you showed me, and what it cost me to obtain from you my happiness?'

"'Oh, do you think that I do not feel that you reproach me for not having defended myself a longer time?' she answered sobbing. 'Alas, dazzled by the liking that I took to you rather than by the affection that you showed me, I surrendered without fear, that some day you would reproach me for not having resisted you longer.'

"'But what a strange idea, Zulica,' he said going

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nearer to her, 'I am reproaching you for tendering me happy? How can you think so? I, who adore you,' he added not forgetting any attention that might prove to her that he spoke the truth.

"'Leave me alone,' she said repulsing him lightly. 'Leave me alone! If it is possible, forget how much I loved you.' Zulica's resistance was so gentle that Nasses would have triumphed over her, even if his persistence had been less eager.

"'You? You will stop loving me?' he said tenderly, accentuating his remarks so that they would appear more convincing, 'you who are to make me happy forever? No, your heart cannot hate me, while mine is filled with the most affectionate sentiments for you.'

"'No,' answered Zulica in a tone which lacked anger, 'no, you traitor! You will not deceive me any more! O, Heavens,' she added still more softly, 'are not you the most unjust and the most cruel man? Ah, leave me alone,— No, you will not convince me any more. I must not forgive you. How I hate you!'

"In spite of all the hatred that Zulica heaped upon Nasses he did not believe for a moment that she did really hate him and, indeed, Zulica did not seem anxious for him to believe it.

"'I do not know whether I flatter myself,' he

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finally said to her, 'but I am ready to vow that you hate me less than you say.'

"'That is a fine triumph,' she answered shrugging her shoulders, 'do you think that I detest you less? Is it my fault that . . . But it is true, I hate you very much. Do not laugh,' she added. 'Nothing is more certain than that.'

"'I respect you more for thinking it,' he answered, 'and until I were to see you unfaithful, I would not believe it. I am, and want to be convinced that you love me as much as you are capable of loving anything.'

"'In that case then,' she replied, 'I love you as much as I can. My heart is not made for moderate passions.'

"'I do believe it and this is just what I wanted to say. The more delicate a woman is the more passionate she is; and that is why you are so unhappy. The world is so depraved nowadays, that the more estimable a woman is the more she is considered ridiculous. I do not say that only women are so unjust to her,—that would be too simple, but I cannot understand why men act in this way—men, who constantly demand from them sincere sentiments.'

"'That is absolutely true,' she said.

"'I see it in life,' he continued. 'What are we men looking for? Love? Oh, no! We only want to satisfy our vanity; we want to be talked about; to pass

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from one woman to another and in order not to miss any, we run after victories, even the most contemptible; more proud of quantity than of the quality of one woman. We are always in search of women, but we never love them.'

"'Ah, how right you are,' she exclaimed, 'but it is also the fault of women. You would despise them less if all of them would have one standard and would indulge in sentiments that would demand more respect.'

"'I am sorry to admit it is true, but nobody can deny that nowadays sentiments have certainly declined a bit.'

"'A bit,' she said with astonishment. 'Ah, say rather very much. Of course, there are still reasonable women, but they are not the majority. I am not speaking about the women who love; for I am certain that you find that they deserve more pity than blame. Those who are guided by love only, far from using love as an excuse, rather do all they can, in order not to be suspected of this sincere feeling.'

"'There are really very few women who are broad-minded enough to speak as you do.'

"'What is the use of dissimulating things that are well known?' she answered. 'I tell you that as much as I want reasonable women to be treated fairly, so much do I want women of bad conduct to be crushed by contempt. That every weakness is excusable is

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true, but assuredly, one cannot condemn vice too harshly.'

"'It is condemned, but it is tolerated,' he answered, 'vice appears only in women who do not inspire desire, and without doubt the greatest charm of a woman nowadays is the indecent air which announces that men can easily triumph over her.'

"I know that those are the kind of women you are mostly in search of. You do not care about the heart. As you do not love, you do not care to be loved, and as long as you triumph over her body, you consider the conquest complete.'

"Wait a minute, Amanzai," said the Sultan. "When does he finally despise her?"

"An admirable question!" exclaimed the Sultana.

"I did not ask it because of maliciousness," answered the Sultan. "In the first place, a question is only a question and then, I think I was perfectly right to ask it. I am being bored and I am not allowed to speak. That is pleasant, isn't it? Instead of a story, I am given a collection of tiresome conversations, where there is not a word to be found that would make me laugh, except during their silence; and after all this, I am considered in the wrong. And in one word, Amanzai, I am warning you, if tomorrow Nasses will not scorn Zulica you will have to answer to me for it."

Chapter XVII

WHICH WILL TEACH FEMININE NOVICES, IF THERE ARE ANY, HOW TO AVOID EMBARRASSING QUESTIONS

“**Y**OUR Majesty surely remembers,” said Amanzai, “the next day . . .”

“Yes,” interrupted the Sultan brusquely, “I remember that I was bored to death yesterday. Is that what you asked me?”

“If you are bored by the story,” said the Sultana, “there is nothing else to do than to finish it.”

“Nothing of the sort, if you please,” answered the Sultan. “I want the story to be continued and it is understood that I do not want to be bored, if possible. I do not expect the impossible.”

Amanzai resumed his story:

“‘I am afraid that you, for example,’ Zulica continued, ‘have not a bit of delicacy.’”

“‘You do me wrong,’ he answered quietly. ‘I am by nature quite susceptible to love; but I admit that I have possessed more women than I have loved.’”

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“‘What a wretch,’ she answered. ‘I cannot understand how you can boast of this.’

“‘I do not boast at all,’ he replied. ‘I am simply stating a fact.’

“‘I believe that you have betrayed many women,’ she said.

“‘I left a few women, but never betrayed any,’ he answered. ‘They did not ask me to be constant, consequently, I did not promise it to them. You understand well, that when people meet without conditions, nobody can be reproached for breaking them.’

“‘I am extremely curious to know all that you have done,’ said Zulica.

“‘You want a very detailed story of my life,’ answered Nasses. ‘That would take too long and would be too tiresome. I will run the risk in obeying you, by suppressing details. It is ten years since I am in society, and I am twenty-five years old, and you are the thirty-third beauty whom I conquered.’

“‘The thirty-third!’ she exclaimed.

“‘It is true that this is the number,’ he answered, ‘but do not be astonished. I have never been the fashion.’

“‘Ah, Nasses,’ she said, ‘how sorry I am that I loved you, and that I so easily believed in your constancy.’

“‘I do not see why,’ he answered. ‘Do you think that because I had thirty-three women that I must love you less?’

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“‘Yes,’ she answered, ‘the less you would have loved, the more I could believe that you would have resources left to love, and finally that your emotions would not have been entirely used up.’

“‘I believe,’ he answered, ‘that I have proved to you that my heart is not exhausted. Besides, to be frank with you, there are few affairs where sentiment is used. Nearly all love affairs are a result of the occasion, convenience, and idleness. People assure each other of their love without feeling it. One sees that it is useless to expect love, so they leave each other before they become bored. It happens at times that they were mistaken about their feelings. They thought it was passion, but it was only infatuation, an emotion which exhausts itself in pleasure, rather than giving rise to love. All this you see, proves that even after many affairs one might not have had a genuine love.’

“‘So you have never loved?’ she asked him.

“‘Pardon me,’ he answered, ‘I have twice loved passionately, and I feel since I have been with you, that if my heart has not been affected, it does not mean that it cannot feel genuine emotion. It means only that I have not yet met anyone who could fill my heart with real sentiment. But you, who interrogates me, won’t you permit me in turn to ask you how many times your heart has been inflamed?’

“‘Yes,’ she answered, ‘I would permit it gladly,

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if I had not already told you. You know that Mazur loved him and you were the only men that I have ever loved.'

"When we knew each other less, it was natural for you to have told me that. I did not even object (impossible as it was to hide your affair with Mazur from me) to your attempt to conceal it, but as present as mutual confidence has been established and since I have no more secrets from you, it seems quite strange to me, I must admit, that you do not make me the confidant of your secrets.'

"You would surely be, if I would have any reserve, but, I swear to you, that in this respect I have no reasons with which to reproach myself, and it astonishes me that in this short time that I have loved you, I have as great confidence in you as I have in myself.'

"I am delighted, madam,' he answered in an offended air, 'but nevertheless, by the way I behaved, I think I had a right to expect more from you than that.' At those words he wanted to leave, but she detained him.

"What does this caprice mean, Nasses?' she asked him tenderly. 'How does it happen that a while ago you considered it a crime on your part to disbelieve me, and now you seem to reproach yourself for believing me?'

"If you want to know the truth, madam,' he

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answered, 'I will tell you, that I did not believe you before; but being occupied with a more pressing interest, I thought it more important to conquer you than to enter into details, which would have displeased you at that moment, and which I had no right to demand from you.'

"'But, Nasses,' Zulica insisted, 'I have nothing more to tell you than I have already told you.'

"'That is not possible, madam,' he interrupted impatiently; 'as you have been in society for the last fifteen years it is impossible to believe that during that time you were not accosted frequently, and that you did not surrender at least a few times. You would be the first woman who did not have during this considerable space of time more than two lovers, or you would have to admit that your taste for love overtook you very recently.'

"'That would not be anything so rare, as to find it incredible,' she answered, 'and I am certain that it happened to other women beside me to remain indifferent such a long time; because they did not meet early enough the affinity which could arouse love in them. I really have nothing to tell you; but if it were true that I did have something to confess on this point, the fear of losing you would always prevent me from doing it. I have often seen what contempt follows that sort of confidence, and though our past loves do not make us guilty towards our

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present lovers, nevertheless it is quite rare that the vanity of men allows them to forgive us the fact that they were not the first ones to love us.'

" 'But what an idea,' he answered. 'Who? I? When you confessed to me all that you did, would I despise you for giving me new proofs of your tenderness and perhaps the most convincing of all, as they were the most difficult to obtain? Well, you loved Mazulhim. Did that astonish me? Does it make me respect you less? Why do you suppose that a few additional lovers of yours would produce upon me an unpleasant impression? Do I have any quarrel with those who preceded me? Is it your fault that destiny did not first offer me to your eyes? No, Zulica, I do not even agree with those who believe that a woman who loved many times is not able to love any more. Far from thinking that the heart becomes exhausted from loving, on the contrary, I am convinced that the more we love, the stronger are our sentiments and the more delicate we become.'

" 'According to this principle you would not regard yourself flattered for being the first lover of a woman?'

" 'I dare say no,' he answered, 'and here is what I base my belief upon, which may seem ridiculous to you. In that tender age when a woman, who never loved, desires to be conquered, she does it rather from curiosity than from sentiment. She rather wants to

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impress than to love. One dazzles her more than one affects her. And can we believe her when she says that she loves? Has she anything to compare with, to make certain of the nature and the power of her sentiments? In a heart in which, on account of the novelty, the slightest emotion seems very strong, the smallest desire disturbs and the most simple sentiment becomes an ecstasy. Finally, it is not when we know so little about love that we can flatter ourselves we feel it.'

"'Perhaps they do not exaggerate their emotions, but at least they say what they think they feel. Whether this disorder is really felt, or exists only in the imagination, I do not see why the lover should feel less happy. No, Nasses, though you blame the first sentiments so much, I would love you a thousand times more than I do, if it were possible, if I had been the first to whom you had paid homage.'

"'You would lose by that more than you realize,' he answered. 'Now I am in a position to appreciate your value much more than at the time you prefer to be loved. Then everything escaped me; spirit, delicacy, sentiment. Always tempted, but loving never, my heart felt no emotion even at the moment of the greatest transport, when I lost control over myself. Nevertheless, I was regarded as being in love and I believed it too. Women flattered themselves for being able to render me so amorous. I too con-

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gratulated myself for being susceptible to such delicate feelings. It seemed to me that I was the only man in the world who could so intensely feel the charms of love. Always at the feet of those whom I loved, often languishing, never satisfied, I found in my heart many resources which to my surprise were of little use. One single glance disturbed me and inflamed my senses. My imagination was always far beyond my pleasures.'

"'Ah, Nasses, Nasses,' Zulica cried out with animation, 'how lovable you must have been then. No, you cannot love now more than you loved at that time.'

"'A thousand times more! At that time, I was carried away by passionate youth. It was to that, rather than to the heart, I owed all the emotions that I believed were love. Since then I thought . . .'

"'Ah,' she interrupted, 'it is impossible that you should not have lost anything by being disillusioned. Jealousy, mistrust, numerous monstrous things that your imagination had invented, all this poisons your present pleasures. More experienced, you love less and therefore you are less happy. Your mind becomes clearer at the expense of your heart; you can discuss love much better than you can love.'

"'This reasoning of yours is just as much against you as it is against me. Always presuming that Mazulhim was your first lover, I ought to conclude that you did not love me as much as you loved him.'

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"‘I am not surprised at all that you have such an idea,’ she answered. ‘You are always after the ideas that put me in a bad light. But let us leave that.’

"‘Nothing of the kind,’ he said. ‘We won’t leave it.’

"‘Besides,’ she continued bitterly, ‘according to the life you lead, it is not surprising at all that you have a bad opinion about women.’

"‘If this is true, it may also be that the way women live prevents me from speaking highly about them. You will say, I suppose, that that is impossible?’

"‘No, I assure you that I would not take the trouble to,’ she disdainfully declared.

"‘I understand,’ he answered. ‘You are afraid that would be useless. So you absolutely refuse to tell me that you have loved?’

"‘What,’ she exclaimed, ‘are you still thinking about that? If you loved me, you would not doubt my word.’

"‘Really, Zulica,’ he said, ‘you may believe it or not, but it seems to me very ridiculous.’

"‘Zulica, who as Your Majesty could notice, wanted to change the conversation . . .’

"‘She did well,’ interrupted the Sultan, “and you would do much better if you would do likewise and spare me all those dissertations that you have at random put into their conversation. You must admit that you are a chatter-box and that you like to talk

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too much! How do you want me to put up with those perfidies? To speak briefly finish your story."

"By means of poor excuses, Zulica resisted Nasses' urging for a long time. Finally she surrendered. After having extorted his word that he would not respect her less, she said:

"'The more I defended myself from satisfying your curiosity, the less I ought not to give in. You will be less pleased by the confession that you have extorted from me, than by my refusal. But you will be wrong. You surely know that it is much easier to inspire a woman with new sensations than to make her pleased with those that she had. I do not know whether falsehood makes women feel this way, but as far as I am concerned, I can swear to you that my silence was not based upon such a mean motive. I do not think it is pleasant to recall to the mind a weakness which, far from returning to the imagination with all the charms that it once had, is always accompanied by remorse and painful recollection of a lover's bad conduct.'

"'This is very true,' said Nasses, 'a delicate woman is always to be pitied.'

"It is true," said the Sultan, "but as I take great joy in listening to you, I should like you to continue (I would not dare to say finish) this wonderful story tomorrow."

Chapter XVIII

FILLED WITH ILLUSIONS VERY DIFFICULT TO FIND

“**Y**OU know then,’ continued Zulica, ‘that when I entered society, (without being more beautiful than another) I did not fail to find more lovers than I wanted. Wholly ignorant I was then, of that which is known as the ascendancy of beauty.’

“‘When I say lovers I understand that crowd of idle men who say that they are in love rather from habit than through sentiment; to whom one listens because it is necessary and who succeed in convincing us that we are lovable rather than in being lovable themselves. They amused my vanity a long time, but did not render me susceptible. As I was born delicate, I feared love. I felt that it would be difficult for me to find a heart just as tender and just as true as mine, and I believed that for a reasonable woman, no matter how happy she might be, there is no greater misfortune than passion. As indifferent as I was, these considerations had a strong effect on me. But I soon realized that my heart was untouched because nobody

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knew how to move it and that this calm we are so proud of is rather a result of chance than of the work of our reason. One moment, one single moment, was sufficient to affect my heart. To see, to love, to adore even; to feel all at once and with an extreme violence, the sweetest and the most cruel emotions which love possesses; to deliver oneself to the most flattering hope to fall back into the most cruel uncertainties all this was the work of one moment. Astonished, confused even, by this condition so new to my soul, consumed by desires heretofore unknown to me, I felt the necessity of discovering the reason for them. Yet I feared to know. Absorbed in this sweet emotion, this divine languor that overwhelmed my senses, I dared not exert my reason in order to destroy these confusing and inexplicable emotions which made me enjoy this undefinable happiness. I finally saw that I loved. Though I was possessed by this feeling, I tried to combat it. Lessons of duty, fear of becoming lost in society, sighs, tears, remorse—all this was useless, or rather augmented that cruel sentiment that tyrannized over me. Ah, Nasses, how happy I was when by the respectful though ardent attention of the man whom I loved, I learned that I was loved too! What disturbance; what rapture. With what respect and consideration did he apprise me of his passion. How sorry I was to be obliged to control my own! How happy you must be, Nasses, to be able, as soon as your heart becomes

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agitated by this emotion to tell it to the person who caused it; not to know this dissimulation which is so necessary to us in order to be respected; and which is so painful to a tender heart!

“How often, when I heard him sighing beside me, did I sigh of misery that I could not tell him I loved him. When his eyes looked tenderly into my own, I found in his such a sweet and amorous expression and then even love. Ah, at those moments when I seemed so far removed, how did I have the power to escape this voluptuousness which overwhelmed me! Finally he made his confession. Nasses! you cannot know what a pleasure it is to hear such a tender and charming admission. He does not tell you that he loves you until after you have made him desire you, sometimes much too long. Only after having made you repeat a thousand times that you love, a timid and adored lover, who is not aware of his happiness, overwhelmed with sentiments, with fear, with respect, falls at your feet, and declares to you all that he feels for you, even lacking the words when he wishes to confess it to you. Trembling so much with emotion that his love makes him fear that he might not be accepted; his words become confused and he repeats them to himself very low, to engrave them on his heart. On his being told that he is not believed, he is hurt inwardly. He exaggerates even what he says to me. He adds to all the love which he feels that which you

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show to him. Nasses, believe me, of all spectacles of all pleasures, those of which I speak are surely the sweetest.'

"If vanity suffices to render agreeable to you, the spectacle that you just painted for me so vividly,' answered Nasses, 'I suppose that when love involves the interest of the heart, then there is nothing more pleasant for you. So he finally spoke, this lover, so tenderly beloved. Did you answer him?'

"Imagine my embarrassment,' she replied, struggling between love and virtue. If virtue does not conquer, at least it serves to disguise the former, but not nearly as much as I desired. Listening too long to his words, my emotion revealed the secret of my heart. While I believed that I answered him coldly, my mouth and my eyes told him a thousand times that my tenderness equalled his own.'

"That is a misfortune that has befallen others,' Nasses replied coldly. 'Well, then, who was this dangerous man, whom, in spite of your natural pride, to see and to love was the same thing?'

"Of what importance is his name to you?' she questioned, 'Did I not tell you what you wanted to know?'

"Not yet,' he replied, 'and you yourself know that your confidence is not complete.'

"Well,' she answered, 'it was the Rajah Amagi.'

"Amagi,' he cried out, 'when did you have him

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for your lover? He is my friend, he hides nothing from me and I know that since he is in society, he has loved only Canzade. Amagi!’ he repeated, ‘but are you not mistaken?’

“‘Most assuredly,’ she cried out in her turn, ‘what a question! It is unique.’

“‘Not at all,’ he answered, ‘you are going to see that it is very simple. Amagi told me that in spite of his extreme affection for Canzade and the little desire that he had to deceive her, he sometimes had amused himself elsewhere. There are women who make such mismanaged advances; and we are such fools that in spite of the contempt they inspire us with, that does not hinder us from being pleased with them, for the moment at least. Speaking of the infidelities that he has committed toward Canzade, he confessed to me that he reproached himself so much more because among the women who had tempted him away from her sometimes, he had not found even one who deserved any respect or affection. What he himself was ridiculous enough to attribute sometimes to such an acute sentiment that it had made him forget all decency was a moment of mental derangement only. You are not one of these women, are you? Consequently, I must believe that he has not loved you.’

“‘You see very well that he did not tell you all,”

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she answered, 'as he has loved me more than three years with all the fire that is possible.'

"'If he has not told it to me,' was the reply, 'it was not because he wanted to make a mystery of it, but it is apparently due to the fact that he did not remember to tell it to me. Was it you who were unfaithful to him?'

"'How much longer do you intend to ask me similar questions,' she demanded of him.

"'I beg your pardon,' he replied, 'but you are not the kind to be abandoned, so that my question should not surprise you. So he left you? After him, who was the one that took his place?'

"'Nobody,' she answered simply. 'Resigned for a long time to the sorrow of having lost him, I flattered myself that I could not be overcome any more. But Mazulhim appeared and I did not keep my word.'

"'My gracious,' he exclaimed, 'women are very unfortunate, and very cruelly exposed to slander.'

"'That is only too true,' she said. 'But how do you happen to think of that now?'

"'In regard to yourself,' he answered, 'to whom, since it must be said, the very injustice has been done to give you a few more adventures than you have had.'

"'Oh,' she answered, 'that neither angers nor surprises me. However little a woman may be less than ugly, it is imagined that she is much more susceptible

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than she ought to be and it is often the men to whom she listened the least that the public links her with. But whatever it is, it is all the same to me. Wouldn't it be possible to get you to speak about other things?'

"Then it is not true that you have had all the lovers that people attributed to you?" he asked her again.

"Zulica did not answer this new impertinence and shrugged her shoulders.

"Do not be angry at what I am saying to you," he resumed. 'If you were less lovable, I would believe more confidently that you have detracted nothing from your story.'

"Pardon me," she answered bitterly, 'Yes, I had all the world at my feet.'

"So," he answered, 'that is exactly what I was told. Your origin is obscure. It is known however, that in your extreme youth, eager to possess talent and persuaded that the best means to acquire it and to perfect it is to be interested strongly in those that possess talent, you did not neglect even your masters. That was the reason you sang with so much taste and you danced with so much grace.'

"Oh God! What horror!" exclaimed Zulica.

"You have reason to exclaim over it, madam," Nasses answered coldly, 'for it is indeed horrible. As for yourself, I do not condemn you and I do not

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know how to esteem you enough, in view of the fact that in an age when women think of freedom, but still retain all sorts of imaginable prejudices, you had enough power of mind to sacrifice those with which your birth and education endowed you. When you entered society, convinced that hypocrisy is the safest course, you hid your inclination toward pleasures under a prudish and cold mask. Both without much affection, but excessively curious, you desired all the men you saw. As much as you could, you probed them thoroughly. When one has as much intelligence and acuteness of mind as you, to fathom a man is not a very difficult thing and I heard it said that the one to whom you have attached yourself for purposes of study did not interest you longer than a week. These philosophical amusements exploded. Your motives were misconstrued and without sacrificing your curiosity you made it more moderate. Still that did not last very long. Your particular conduct not having the sanction of those who knew of it, caused you to evade them. You then renounced this solitude and proceeded to bring into the world this natural curiosity toward all men. Princess Saheb had then Iskender for a lover. You wanted to judge for yourself whether one could trust her good taste and you seduced him for her. She has never forgiven you and even now complains of it daily.'

"'Oh, heavens!' exclaimed Zulica, shaken with

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grief, 'is there in all the world any more vicious slander than this?'

"'I was assured,' he continued in the same calm manner as before, 'that you soon forsook Iskender to take Akebar-Mirza. (Prince though he was, you found him tiresome). You also added Vizir Atamulk and Emir Naurreddin.

"'The Prince confined himself chiefly to entertaining you with stories of his ill health. (You probably knew more about it than the prince mentioned.) The Vizir, too occupied with affairs of state to be as attentive to your charms as he should have been, entertained you solely with weighty political problems and Emir Naurreddin boasted of his great deeds while at war. You were wearied of these three persons, who were more important than lovable.

"'People dare even suggest, knowing how dangerous it is to have enemies at Court, you had kept them in ignorance regarding the manner in which you disposed of them and that forced to treat them with prudence, you threw yourself (with all possible secrecy) into the arms of young Velid, who was less great, less profound, less militant, but more agreeable than his rivals. With him alone for a time, you compensated yourself for the boredom the other caused you. It is also said, that on finding Velid less amorous and having to rekindle his ardour by making him jealous, you gave yourself to Jemla; and that Velid,

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angered at the prospect of a rival, and having speculated on you carefully, had finally discovered the three others. The whole scandal so carefully guarded up to this time, was exposed with the most injurious, cruel and public mortification for you.'

"'Ah, this is too much,' interrupted Zulica rising, 'and I see . . .'

"'Another while yet, madam, if you please,' Nasses said in an effort to detain her. 'People carried their impudence to a point which suggested their saying that usual affairs did not content you; that hating love, but still cherishing passion, you only allowed yourself passing enjoyments, sufficiently agreeable to fill your idle moments, but never vital enough to captivate your heart.'

"'It is a form of philosophic thought so to say, that hinders the progress of this century. The wisdom and utility of it I could easily demonstrate, were the time appropriate.'

"At the end of this discourse, Zulica wept violently, while Nasses feigning not to notice it continued:

"'You appreciate fully that I am doing you too much justice and that I know you too well to believe all that I have been told about you.'

"'You are too indulgent,' she replied.

"'No,' he replied modestly. 'What I am doing is most simple. To test my attitude toward you I need only to recall the manner in which you yielded

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to my wishes. But you will grant that although I do not believe all of the story, it is impossible not to believe some of it.'

"'But why?' she demanded. 'All you have been told about me is so probable that I cannot comprehend the unusual consideration you accord me.'

"'But I do believe . . .' he began to answer.

"'Believe what you will, Sir,' she interrupted curtly, 'believe everything and let us not see each other again.'

"'Even if you should merit it,' he answered, 'I would still be incapable of doing it. Think, Nasses, believing you to be innocent how could I take so much upon myself? How could I be barbarous enough to do what you seem to advise me?'

"'No, no,' she replied, 'you place credence in everything you are told. You believe it all, and you are not worth the trouble for me to disillusion you.'

"'We are to quarrel then?' he asked. 'This very evening will have witnessed the birth and death of your passion for me. I do not speak of mine,' he added, 'since I feel too well my own passion will be eternal.'

"'Yes, we shall quarrel,' answered Zulica. 'Yes, always.'

"'Always!' he cried, 'That is to say you will leave me as promptly as you received me? That is, on my honour, unbelievable. But how can this prodigious

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fidelity upon which you pride yourself, how can this soul so delicate in sentiment apply itself to such procedure? What cruel violence will you not inflict upon yourself to keep your word! How I pity you!

“‘After all, since you had to change, nothing could have been more fortunate for me than your promptness in doing so. A more prolonged relationship with you would have made your inconstancy too painful for me to bear. I am flattering myself, however, that you will yet reflect upon your decision. If it is true that your liking for me is totally extinguished, you will fear at least I might say, that in spite of the tenderness you lavished upon me, and although you had nought but praise for me, you were incapable of remaining constant for twenty-four hours. After the harmless liberties which you permitted me, the world will consider your decision unwise, I caution you. No,’ he continued advancing toward her and taking her gently in his arms, ‘No, you will not be so unfair to the most passionate lover in all the world.’

“‘Who, I?’ she cried, struggling violently in his arms, ‘I? I would be your mistress again?’

“She added some words which made it apparent to Nasses how keen the indignation was she felt toward him. He tried vainly to overcome her resistance, her scorn serving her in better stead than the severe virtue (which she barely defended). He was obliged to struggle valiantly for the smallest fav-

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ours, which he could have had for the asking a short while before. Thus she defended herself against him, until they heard the noise of an approaching carriage and so his attack and her defense came to an abrupt termination.

“‘There, there are my guests,’ she said to him, ‘and I am leaving. I do not urge you to reflect upon what transpired between us, that will be futile; for the more apt one is to behave unbecomingly, the less one is capable of realizing it.’

“She arose as she concluded her speech and was about to depart when something occurred about which I shall tell your Majesty tomorrow, compelling her to remain.”

“Why tomorrow?” asked the Sultan, “do you think you would hesitate to tell it to me today if I had a desire to listen? Fortunately for you, I have not the least curiosity about it, so today, tomorrow or any other day is all the same to me.”

Chapter XIX

SO MUCH THE BETTER

AFTER what transpired between Zulica and Mazulhim she had little reason to believe that she would ever see him again. None the less, it was he who now made his appearance. She recoiled in surprise on seeing him. Tears succeeded her astonishment and she fell upon the divan. He feigned not to notice her disturbed mood, of which he was obviously the cause and approached her in a careless manner.

“I am here, my queen, to plead for your pardon. Numerous affairs, accursedly frightful and desperate, prevented me from placing myself at your service. What? Are you crying? You have abused my liberality, my friendship and my confidence. But truly, I understand none of it. You are angered? That which is the cause of my fury and desolate state will never console me. That is indeed an adventure unique, astonishing and of rarest quality. Finally, may not one learn what it is about? Tell me—you are so silent. Ah, I see it now; it is I who am the innocent

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cause of it. Yes, you believe me unfaithful,—yes, you believe it. How ill you know my heart. I have returned to you a thousand times more tender than ever,—more enchanted than ever.’ The more persistently Mazulhim affected his love, the more obstinately silent Zulica became.

“Nasses who experienced a malicious enjoyment from this confusion, feared that if he responded to Mazulhim’s queries, Zulica would gain sufficient time to compose her scattered wits and he waited impatiently for her to speak. It was futile. The three remained silent for some time.

“‘In the name of heaven, clear up this mystery!’ Mazulhim finally turned to Nasses, ‘Is it you or I who cause this lady sorrow? Does she not love me? Does she love you?’

“‘Not at all,’ replied Nasses, ‘If you must know, it is I whom this unfaithful woman has chosen to discard. We have quarreled.’

“‘Ah, perfidious creature,’ cried Mazulhim, ‘and that—after all the sermons you have preached to me about being always faithful. What horror!’

“‘It was with deep sorrow that I ventured into madame’s niche to apprise her of your loss,’ Nasses replied. ‘It was a duty I felt I owed her, and now to complete my task, though it was an expensive one, I am going to let you try with what facility you can to console her for my loss. Adieu, madame,’ he

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continued turning to Zulica. 'My good fortune lasted none too long, but I am so well aware of the kindness that abounds in your heart, I dare hope that you will grant me in the future that which your reserve denied me today. Should you some time recall me to your fancy, be assured that I am always to serve you.'

"When Nasses left, Zulica rose brusquely and without looking at Mazulhim she made an effort to leave

...

"'No, madame,' he said in a serious tone, 'I cannot permit you to leave me without justifying myself. It is also likely that you might have some excuses to offer for your conduct. Be that as it may, it would appear indecent for us to separate without explanations. Will you always be so silent? Do you not recall that once you promised me eternal fidelity?'

"'Ah,' she replied in tears, 'do not add more injury to those you have already heaped upon me by speaking to me of love—which you never felt.'

"'Well then,' he answered, 'that is woman's nature. One fails to keep an appointment in spite of himself. One sorrows, wilts, languishes of pain. When one returns completely immersed in tender passion, and throws himself at the feet of his beloved and when one merits only pity, you detest him. After all, you would have been more considerate if you were less sensitive. With sensitive souls one must

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avoid any form of irritation. I am grateful to you for your anger, for without it I would always have remained ignorant of the great love you bore me and I would have loved you less. But tell me,' he added approaching her familiarly, 'are you really very hurt?'

"Zulica made no response to this question, other than glancing scornfully at him.

"'After all,' he resumed, 'it would be rather easy for me to justify myself. Indeed,' he added when he saw her shrug her shoulders, 'it would be very easy, without exaggeration. For admit, what wrong have I done you?'

"'Truly!' she cried, 'I admire your impudence! To make me come here and not to keep your appointment. Bad, impertinent, despicable as this procedure is, your character is quite capable of it and it does not astonish me. But to add to your perfidious nature, you sent here a perfect stranger in whom you confided my frailty, when you should have kept it secret from the entire world.'

"'Yes, hidden it,' he interrupted. 'That would have been a delightful mystery and useful as well. Do you imagine that an affair between two persons like ourselves can be kept secret? But I suppose that even contrary to all your experience, you would shut your eyes sufficiently to believe that you would never become exposed. How, permit me to ask you, have I exposed you? Is not our secret safer in the hands of

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a gentleman of high rank, rather than in those of a slave? And even if I had entrusted my message to the servant whom you found here, and who usually attends to my most confidential matters? But, time was short, so I chose one of my closest friends to inform you of what had befallen me. Nasses, who is not only intelligent, but also very sedate, deserved to be received by you with great consideration and much esteem and gratitude. And finally, I take the liberty of telling you, that I do not see why after you have so successfully made him fall under obligations to you, you should complain of the man I sent you? Between us, your attitude requires explanation. However, you will probably explain when it suits you. Without wishing to hurt you, I may say that I am neither as curious nor as importunate as you.'

"'What insolence and fatuity!' Zulica cried.

"'Gently, if you please, madame, with expressions of this kind,' Mazulhim said severely. 'Even if I were as you see me, there are a thousand things with which I could reproach you too and I beg you, graciously, not to oblige me to grow revengeful. If you wish to do me the honor of listening to me, we shall discuss this amicably. Perhaps you will gain thereby as much as I will. Let us see. First of all, that the presence of Nasses seemingly annoyed you, I do not doubt. Nor do I doubt that in order to put yourself at ease in

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his presence you showered him with all those attentions with which I was to be favoured.'

"And even if it were so,' Zulica said haughtily.

"It was so,' he interrupted.

"Well, then, yes,' she answered courageously, 'yes I did love him . . .'

"Let us not abuse that word,' he again interposed. 'You did not love him at all, but the result was the same. Admit, now that you know him better, that he is a man of rare merit.'

"All I know,' she responded coldly, 'is that if he is an insolent and incosiderate fop, he has at least some qualities to offset that. But there are others who dare assume his mannerisms and who, for many reasons, might better be much more reserved.'

"Unwarranted as your remarks are,' he resumed, 'I am quite certain that they are directed at me, and I wish to give you, whatever the consequences may be, the small consolation of admitting it. I will even go further and deny myself a justification, which will wound my pride.'

"What dreadful things you say,' she cried, looking at him with pity, 'And how ill this light and bantering tone becomes a type like you.'

"Say what you might, madam,' he answered, 'I shall not swerve from the respect I owe you, nor from my plan which I have resolved to follow. I shall be glad to serve as a criterion of prudence. Perhaps, when

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you see me so loyal to my principles, you will be tempted to imitate me?’

“‘You will practice your boasted prudence in solitude, for I am leaving.’

“‘No, if you please, madame,’ he said, detaining her, ‘you shall not leave me. It is not in this manner that people like ourselves end an affair. For the sake of your honour and mine and to avoid a scandal which would be more unbearable for you than for me, we ought to arrive at a mutual understanding. In a word, Zulica, you will listen to me.’

“Either Zulica felt the harm this scandal might cause her if she failed to control herself and realized that she must, under all circumstances, be assured of Mazulhim’s silence, or she was already too debased to be hurt by his contempt. Her anger gradually abated. She then threw herself back upon the divan without glancing at Mazulhim, who, hardly affected by her indifference, continued his discourse.

“‘You admit that you had an affair with Nasses. Others might say that usually a woman does not enter into a new relationship until after she has completely broken the old one. These would shower you with the insults your conduct seems to deserve. I, on the other hand, being a man of the world and understanding the situation perfectly, not only do I not think less of you, but I love you the more for it.’

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“‘This is not the effect which I desire to produce upon you,’ she replied.

“‘You know nothing about it,’ he responded, ‘How can you, in your present state of mind, distinguish your motives? You believe me to be unfaithful. You were urged to revenge yourself. If you had loved me less, you would not have done it and Nasses would have attempted in vain to lead you on as far as he did. Believe me, only the most violent passion can arouse those emotions which allow no time for thought or freedom of action.

“‘I am astonished beyond measure that Nasses had so little delicacy as to wish to profit by the situation you found yourself in. Or was he blinded to a degree which made it impossible for him to realize that even while you were in his arms, you belonged to another and that had it not been for the love you bore me, you would have never had the opportunity to make him happy.’

“‘Oh, no,’ she said, ‘I liked him enormously and I was unfaithful to you according to all accepted rules and standards.’

“‘This is pure vanity on your part,’ answered Mazulhim. ‘Do not believe it for it has not a grain of truth in it.’

“‘What? Not a grain of truth in it?’ she echoed, ‘I find it unusually odd that you should know more about it than I.’

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“‘I know it so well, indeed,’ he said, ‘that I could easily repeat to you each step that led to your seduction. Nasses found you enchanting. Hence, he was more concerned about learning from you the sweet mystery of love, than he was about asking you to forgive me. I should even wager that not only was he disinclined from presenting my case favorably, but . . .’

“‘It is undoubtedly so,’ she interrupted.

“‘Did I not say that?’ he continued. ‘How miserable was his triumph and what an exceedingly poor flatterer he is. After all, there are people who must be forgiven these petty stratagems. They need them to gain advantages.’

“‘What?’ she interrupted, with astonishment. ‘You dare suggest that you were not faithless?’

“‘Assuredly,’ answered Mazulhim. ‘And it is for that reason that you find this adventure so pleasantly agreeable.’

“‘You were not culpable?’ she repeated. ‘What have you become?’

“‘I did not leave the Emperor’s palace,’ he replied, ‘until a few moments ago, and even Zadis, who incidentally has been chided for having been out of sight all day yesterday, was with me the entire time. He will bear witness to it.’

“Upon hearing the name of Zadis, Zulica trembled and blushing gazed upon Mazulhim, who, while ap-

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parently not noticing her reaction, continued in this fashion.

“‘Although I shall always have the liveliest affection for you, you understand that we shall never indulge in the intimacies which you once permitted me. It is not because I do not forgive you wholly. Traffic of this nature is inconvenient. Besides, we were largely overwhelmed by fancies of love, rather than by love itself. It was not sentiment that brought us together. What is happening now need not mortify you, nor displease me, nor even hinder us from indulging in a caprice should we find ourselves susceptible some time to resuming our relationship.’

“‘Oh, I am flattered!’ she said disdainfully. ‘And I presume that this arrangement puts you at a disadvantage and that you secretly hope I shall not consent to it . . .’

“‘Forgive me,’ he resumed. ‘You are too sensible not to appreciate the obligations one owes to one’s old friends. Besides, you must know that in this age it is an established custom to have as many affairs as one can and to accord much consideration to new acquaintances without deying anything to the old. I am certain that you will adjudge this arrangement wise and I consider it as quite settled between us.’

“Zulica, although accustomed to ribaldry of this kind, felt keenly offended that Mazulhim believed her to be capable of doing such things, even though

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they were a matter of course for her. She attempted a dignified air, which while making her still more unhappy, encouraged Mazulhim to continue to treat her with less delicacy than ever.

“‘Were it not so late,’ he said, ‘I would endeavor to show you that you have little cause to complain of me and that instead, you owe me rather much gratitude. I am aware that yesterday Zadis spent the entire day with you and part of the night. More curious than jealous, and certain that you would not keep the promise you gave me never to see him again, I arranged to have you both watched . . .’

“‘It was not necessary for you to have taken all this trouble,’ she interrupted. ‘I had no intention of hiding and the motive which prompted me to receive Zadis yesterday will always do me honour.’

“‘Oh,’ he said in surprise, ‘that is most singular!’

“‘Your mocking air will not alter the truth of my statement,’ she answered. ‘I had not then severed my relationship with him. It was in order to inform him that I shall never see him again that I . . .’

“‘That you,’ he interrupted, ‘passed the day and the entire night with him. I do not contradict the motive, extraordinary as it was, for you will admit that rarely does a woman shut herself in with a man for twenty-four hours, merely to quarrel. But—extraordinary occurrences may still happen. I who seek merely reasons with which to justify your con-

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duct, I presume that Zadis after having been chastised by you, almost died of despair and perhaps you were hurt by the despondency your unfaithfulness caused him. You deigned console him with all the powers you possess, quite oblivious of the vows you made me.

“A desperate man is hardly reasonable. It is difficult to persuade him to conduct himself sensibly. It is necessary to talk to him at length, to repeat statements, to reproach him, to weep before him and to grow furious. Besides, you need not regret that you sought to calm Zadis, for he was charmingly gay today. Zadis happy! Does it seem conceivable to you? If what you told me, and I shall try not to doubt you, is true, either your exhortations have deeply impressed him, or he must have loved you only slightly to bear his loss so easily. If the former instance does honour to your mental faculties, the latter does little credit to your charms. But do not feel badly about it, for you know well I have no desire to wound you. At all events, you should instruct him to appear sad, at least, while you require means wherewith to deceive me.’

“Zulica now attempted to defend her conduct, but Mazulhim interrupted her.

“All that you might tell me, madame, will be futile. Spare your excuses which I do not require nor wish to hear. They will only annoy you without

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satisfying me. Adieu,' he said arising, 'it is late now and we must separate. Ah—and apropos of Nasses, what will you do with him?'

"Zulica was astonished at the question.

"‘What I ask,’ he continued, ‘seems sensible to me. You two separated quarreling. That was most imprudent on your part. You would do well to see him again. Believe me you had better avoid a scandal. It should not be any more difficult for you to see him without showing him hate, than it was for you to have lived with him without showing him love.

"‘If you will persist in avoiding him, he might discuss the incident, and though nothing would seem more harmless than what you did, still there would be many evil minded persons who would place a most singular construction upon your conduct. Finally what others might say need not disturb you, for where one has gained a certain reputation one affair more or less is of little account, but it is important to avoid making enemies. Tomorrow then, I shall bring him with me.’

"‘I will see you tomorrow?’ she exclaimed.

"‘Yes,’ he answered extending his hand to her, ‘you must do that. If by chance, Zadis should consider the situation in the wrong light, you may count upon me. He will either be obliged to leave you in peace or he shall have to accustom himself to seeing us wooing each other.’

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"Having finished his speech, he offered her his hand again, which she obstinately refused to take.

"'How terrible!' he said. 'Your childish behaviour is most exasperating.'

"Then they both left."

"They both left!" exclaimed the Sultan, "ah, what a magic word. It is upon my word the choicest morsel in your entire story. And did they not return?"

"I never saw Zulica again," replied Amanzai, "although I saw Mazulhim time and again."

"And always, you know," interjected the Sultan, "My word, he was a fine fellow. And what woman followed Zulica?"

"Many, who were not much better than she, and some who hardly deserved him, and whose fate made me pity them."

"Tell me," said Schah-Baham to the Sultana, "did you not think Mazulhim treated Zulica poorly?"

"I think she was so contemptible," replied the Sultana, "I should wish, were it only possible, that he had punished her even more cruelly."

"It seemed to me," retorted the Sultan, "that she was too considerate. It is contrary to all natural instincts."

"And I believe the contrary," said the Sultana, "A woman like Zulica has little within her to combat contempt. And since the ignominy of her conduct

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exposes her to the most cruel insults the baseness of her character, and the inward burning shame which she feels in spite of herself, do not leave her enough vitality to parry. Besides, were it true that Amanzai had exaggerated her humiliation, he deserves therefor not reproaches, but praises. For, in a fashion, to paint vice as laudable and triumphant is to encourage it."

"Oh, yes," agreed the Sultan, "That is so, but let us stop this discussion. It sours my disposition and I do not doubt that if it lasts much longer I shall lose my temper. When you left Mazulhim, where did you go, Amanzai?"

Chapter XX

AMUSEMENTS OF THE SOUL

ALTHOUGH I derived considerable amusement in Mazulhim's little house, for the benefit of my imprisoned soul, I was obliged to leave this retreat, convinced that there my soul would not be liberated. I proceeded to search for some house where I might, if it were possible, be more fortunate than those I formerly inhabited. After several rounds, which offered me nothing more than I had previously seen, which are hardly worth telling you, I entered a vast palace which belonged to one of the most distinguished gentlemen in Agra. I wandered about for some time. Finally I chose for my resting place, a cabinet ornamented with sumptuous magnificence and good taste, although the latter usually excludes the former. Everything there breathed of voluptuousness; the ornaments; the furnishings; the odours of exquisite perfumes; incense burning unceasingly—all that was absorbed by the eyes, as well as by the soul. This cabinet could easily pass for a sanctuary of voluptuousness, for a veritable abode of pleasure.

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"A moment after I had secreted myself, the divinity to whom I was to belong entered. She was the daughter of Omrath, in whose palace I found myself. Her youth, her grace, her beauty, and a certain radiance which can not be defined, and which give to women their power; all that which is charming and agreeable emanated from her face. My soul could not behold her without being moved. It experienced countless delicious sensations of which I did not believe it capable. Destined to remain for some time close to this beautiful person, I ceased to torment myself upon my fate and even began to dread the possibility of my liberation.

"'Ah, Brahma,' said I to myself, 'What is the reward you are preparing for those who serve you well, if you permit those souls who merit your divine anger to feast themselves upon such delights? Come,' I continued enraptured, 'come, charming vision of my divinity, come and sooth my turbulent soul, which would mingle with yours, if a cruel fate did not enslave it in its prison.'

"It seemed to me then that Brahma lent an ear to my prayer. The sun was at its zenith, the heat was excessive. Zeinis commenced her preparations to enjoy the sweetness of slumber and drawing the curtains, permitted only a semi-daylight to enter, so conducive to sleep and to pleasure, which detracts nothing, but adds to their voluptuousness, which

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makes modesty less timid, and which permits love a greater sway.

"A simple tunic of gauze, almost entirely open, was soon the only garment she wore. She nonchalantly reclined upon the divan. Heaven! With what ecstasy my soul received her. Brahma, having imprisoned my soul in divans, gave me the privilege of placing it in whatever part I chose, and with what pleasure I availed myself of this liberty.

"I chose with extreme care the place from which I could most advantageously feast upon the charms of Zeinis. I contemplated them with the ardour of the most passionate lover, and with an admiration that even the most indifferent could not refuse them. Heavens! What beauty offered itself to my gaze! Sleep finally shut her eyes which inspired so much love in me.

"I entertained myself then in perusing all her charms which I had not previously noticed and in returning to those which I had already enjoyed. Although Zeinis slept tranquilly enough, she turned over several times, and each movement disarranged her tunic; offering to my avid glances new delights. So much loveliness began to trouble my soul. Overcome by numerous and violent desires, all of its faculties became suspended for a while. Vainly I tried to reason. I felt only that I loved, and without foreseeing or fearing the results of such a dreadful

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passion, I abandoned myself entirely to it. 'Delightful creature,' I cried at last, 'no, you cannot be mortal. So much charm is not men's heritage. More perfect even than celestial beings, there is no quality in them you do not eclipse. Ah, deign to receive the homage of a soul that adores you! Gird yourself against preferring some vile mortal! Zeinis! Divine Zeinis! No, there is no one who deserves you, because there is no one who is like you.'

"While I was contemplating Zeinis with such ardour, she became restless and changed her position, which I found to be very advantageous. In spite of my disturbed state, I thought of profiting thereby. Zeinis was reclining at the edge of the divan. Her head was on a cushion, her mouth almost touching it. I could, in spite of the rigours that Brahma imposed upon me, somewhat gratify the violence of my desires. My soul placed itself upon the cushion, so close to Zeinis's mouth that it finally succeeded in gaining her lips.

"There are, without doubt, certain delights that a soul can experience, to which the term pleasure can not be applied, and even the word voluptuousness is inadequate. This sweet intoxication and impetuousness into which my soul plunged, and which permeated all its faculties, is indescribable. No doubt, our soul, hampered by its physical attributes, obliged to measure its emotion as by its weakness, cannot,

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while imprisoned in a body, yield itself so completely as one that is unencumbered. We feel this at times when experiencing a keen sensation of pleasure which desiring to break the barriers that the body imposes diffuses itself in the prison, carries there a trouble and fire which devours it, seeks an outlet in vain and exhausted by the efforts it has made, sinks into a languor, which for some time seems to have annihilated the bonds. Such is, I believe, the cause of the exhaustion that excessive voluptuousness brings upon us.

“Such is the fate of our soul, always restless in the midst of the greatest pleasures, reduced to look for more than it can find. My soul, clinging to the mouth of Zeinis, steeped in its happiness, searched to attain a still greater one. It attempted, but in vain, to insinuate its entire being into that of Zeinis. Confined in the prison by Brahma’s cruel orders, all its efforts could not release it. Its outbursts redoubled. Its ardour, the fury of its desires, apparently excited those of Zeinis. No sooner did my soul perceive the impression which it produced on her than it redoubled its efforts. It wandered with greater vivacity on the lips of Zeinis; it insinuated itself with greater rapidity; it clung there with greater tenacity. The disturbance which commenced to seize hold of Zeinis added to my fire and passion. Zeinis sighed—I sighed. Her mouth articulated a few words in-

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distinctly; a warm colour suffused her face. At last a most seductive dream bewildered her senses. Soft movements succeeded the calm in which she had been plunged.

"‘Yes, you love me!’ she exclaimed tenderly. Several words, broken by most gentle sighs, followed. ‘Do you doubt that you are loved?’ she murmured.

"‘Still less free than Zeinis, I listened to her in ecstasy, but I was too exhausted to answer. Soon her soul, as confused as mine, abandoned itself to the flame in which it was consumed, a sweet trembling . . . Heavens! How ravishing Zeinis became!

"‘My delight and hers were dissipated by her awakening. Nothing of the sweet illusion which had filled her senses remained; nought but a melting languor to which she yielded with a sensuousness which made her worthy of the pleasures which she had enjoyed.

"‘Her glances permeated with love, were inflamed with the fire which flowed in her veins. When she finally opened her eyes, they had already lost the voluptuous expression which my love had inspired. Yet how touching they were still! What mortal, facing such happiness, would not expire from the excess of love and joy!

"‘‘Zeinis,’ I cried with emotion, ‘sweet Zeinis! I have come to make you happy. It is to the perfect fusion of our souls that you owe your happiness.

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May you always be thus, and may you forever respond to my ardour. No, Zeinis, there is no other devotion more tender and more faithful. If I were able to remove my soul from the power of Brahma, or if He were able to forget it, eternally attached to yours, it would be through you alone, that its immortality could attain happiness, and that it could perpetuate its being. If I ever lose you, soul that I adore, O, how in the immensity of nature, where overwhelmed by the cruel orders with which Brahma would shackle me, could I ever find you again. Ah, Brahma! if your supreme power wrests me from Zeinis, allow me at least, never to lose the memory of her, no matter how sorrowful.' While my soul so tenderly communed with Zeinis, this charming maiden abandoned herself to the sweetest reveries and I began to grow alarmed at the tranquillity the dream produced upon her, while just a few moments before I found so much to be hopeful about.

"Zeinis," I said to myself, 'is undoubtedly accustomed to the pleasures which she just now experienced. Whatever impression they might have made on her senses, they have not at all astonished her imagination. She dreams, but she does not appear to ask herself the cause of the emotions which agitated her. Familiar with the most genuine and tender ecstasy that love possesses, I only caused her to relive the idea. A man more fortunate has already de-

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veloped in the heart of Zeinis the germ of tenderness which nature had planted there. It is his image, not my ardour, that inflamed her. She knows love, she spoke of it. She seemed in the midst of her emotion, to be occupied with the care of reassuring a lover, who was perhaps accustomed to place before her both his fears and distresses. Ah, Zeinis! if it is true that you have already loved, then in the state wherein the anger of Brahma confined me, my fate will become horrible.

"My soul was thus wandering aimlessly when I heard a soft knocking at the door. Zeinis's blushes augmented my fears. She promptly adjusted the disorder which her restless slumber had created and appearing more presentable she ordered the person to enter.

"‘Ah,’ said I to myself, immersed in grief, ‘it is a rival probably. How I shall suffer if he seems happy! If he becomes happy and Zeinis, to whom I owe my deliverance, is in fact what I sometimes fancy her to be, what terrible sorrow I shall experience upon learning that I must leave her after she has inspired such lofty emotions within me.’ Although with the knowledge I possessed about the prevailing morals of Agra, I should not have felt any fear of leaving Zeinis.

"At fifteen years of age she might not have had all the qualities which Brahma required for the liberation of my soul. It was also probable that I might

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have had ample reason to fear everything on that side as well. But, however cruel the thought was of witnessing the abundant affection she might shower upon my rival, I preferred rather to be thus punished than to lose her.

“At Zeinis’s command a youthful Hindu with radiant face entered the room. The more worthy he seemed to me of receiving favors, the more he aroused my hatred, particularly when contemplating the manner in which Zeinis received him.

“Confusion, love and fear were in turn displayed upon her face. She examined him for some time without uttering a word. He seemed quite as agitated as she was, but from his timid and respectful demeanor, I deducted that even though he had been loved, he was not yet completely favored. In spite of this disturbed air and his extreme youth, for he was hardly older than Zeinis, this did not seem to be his first affair of the heart. I began to hope that I shall derive from this adventure nought but chagrin, which I could more easily bear.

“‘Ah, Pheleas!’ Zeinis said with emotion, ‘what brought you here?’

“‘You,’ he replied falling upon his knees, ‘you, without whom I cannot live—— You, who promised yesterday that I might see you alone.’

“‘Do not expect me to keep my word,’ she inter-

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jected quickly. 'Let us go out, I do not want to stay longer in this room.'

"Zeinis,' he resumed. 'do you regret the happiness you grant me by remaining alone with me? And do you repent so soon for the first favour you accorded me?'

"But, can we not speak elsewhere?' she responded with embarrassment. 'Besides, if you loved me, you would desist from obstinately demanding that for which I have so much repugnance.'

"Pheleas, without replying, grasped her hand and kissed it with as much ardour as I myself would have. Zeinis looked at him languidly. She sighed, still moved by that dream which depicted him as the ardent lover and herself as a frail creature. Now she was still more inclined toward love because of the lasting impressions of her dream. Each time her eyes were turned toward Pheleas, they grew softer and assumed unconsciously some of the voluptuousness which my own had experienced a little before.

"In spite of Pheleas's lack of experience, his tenderness which made him attentive to every whim of Zeinis, I noticed that she derived much pleasure from it. Besides, Zeinis, simple and artless, endeavored to hide, through prudishness alone, the condition his presence created. Believing that she was successful in her efforts she exposed her agitation all the more fully.

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"Pheleas, not sufficiently learned in the arts of triumphing over a coquette, whose false virtue and apparent decency would have frightened him, was none the less dangerous enough for Zeinis, who, pursued by passion, did not know, even while fearing to yield, how to proceed in order to defend herself.

"Although she enjoyed seeing Pheleas on his knees, she begged him to rise. Far from obeying her, he clasped her knees in such tender manner and with such ecstatic eagerness, that Zeinis sighed.

"‘Ah, Pheleas,’ she pleaded with emotion, ‘let us leave, I conjure you.’

"‘Will you always fear me?’ he asked softly. ‘Oh, Zeinis! How little my love affects you. What is there to fear from a lover who adores you; who almost from birth was smitten by your charms, and who since then, singularly moved by them, only wants to live for your sake? Zeinis,’ he added in tears, ‘see to what a state you reduce me.’

"After uttering these words, he raised his tear-filled eyes to her. She gazed at him soothingly for some time and finally yielded to the emotion which the love and the sorrow of Pheleas aroused in her, she said in a voice filled with tears, which she could not check,

"‘Ah, cruel creature, did I deserve the reproaches you shower upon me? What other proofs of my

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affection can I give you, if those you have already received, still make you doubt me?’

“‘If you really loved me,’ he replied, ‘would you not have dismissed your severe reserve while you are alone with me? Far from desiring to leave this place, what fears could you entertain other than to yield to my passion?’

“‘Alas,’ she said naively, ‘who told you I have other fears?’

“Upon these words, Pheleas rose brusquely from his kneeling position, ran towards the door and locked it. Returning he met Zeinis who, divining his purpose, also rose in order to hinder his contemplated undertaking. He took her in his arms and in spite of the resistance she showed him, he threw her upon the divan and seated himself close to her.

Chapter XXI

“**I** DO not know whether Zeinis thought a closed door precluded the necessity of defending herself, or fearing less the possibility of detection, she became more brave. Hardly had Pheleas placed himself beside her, when Zeinis blushed, less because of what he did to her rather than because of what she feared he wanted to do. Even before he made any demands upon her, she begged him in a trembling, halting voice to ask nothing of her.

“Zeinis’s tone pleaded rather than commanded and Pheleas was neither hindered nor vexed. Lying beside her he grasped her in his arms with such fury that in spite of her realization that she had much to fear, she could not help sharing her lover’s ecstasy. Although she was very much moved, she endeavored to disengage herself from his arms, but her desire to fail in her efforts was so obvious that Pheleas did not have to employ persuasive methods to overcome her slight resistance.

“They gazed upon each other for some time without uttering a sound, while Zeinis, conscious of a rising turbulence that pervaded her being and fearing

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that she might not be able to overcome it, pleaded with her lover to desist, but so imperceptibly.

“‘Will you never make me happy?’ he insisted.

“‘Ah,’ she responded with a thoughtlessness which I have never forgiven her, ‘you are now but too happy and before you ventured here you were even more so’

“The more obscure these words seemed to Pheleas, the more urgently he felt the need to know what she meant. Although she was most reluctant to explain, he insisted with such tenderness and looked at her so passionately, that she finally consented to elucidate.

“‘And if I tell you,’ she said in a tremulous voice ‘you will abuse my confidence.’

“He softly assured her he would not. His mild promise, however, was far from soothing and she must have felt that he would not keep his word. Too disturbed to fashion her thoughts coherently, or too inexperienced to realize the magnitude of the confidence she was about to divulge to him, after further resisting her lover’s imprecations, she confided to him that immediately before he arrived, while she was yet asleep, she saw him in such ecstatic situation as she never thought possible.

“‘Was I in your arms?’ he asked holding her in his own.

“‘Yes,’ she responded and raised to him her troubled eyes.

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“‘Ah,’ he continued, with extreme emotion, ‘you loved me more then than you love me now.’

“‘I could not have loved you more,’ she replied, ‘but it is true that I was less afraid to confess to you.’

“‘And then,’ he urged her on.

“‘Ah, Pheleas,’ she cried blushing, ‘what are you asking of me? You were happier by far then than I ever desired you to be and you were no less unjust.’

“Pheleas, not able to control his passion any longer and emboldened by confidences Zeinis entrusted to him, raised himself somewhat and bending over did what he could to reach her mouth with his own. Zeinis would perhaps not have taken offense at these advances, rash as they were, but Pheleas, completely concerned with his own happiness, carried his audacity so far that she believed his boldness unpardonable.

“‘Oh, Pheleas,’ she cried, ‘are these the promises you made me? And are you so little afraid of angering me?’

“In spite of the violence of Pheleas’s passion, Zeinis defended herself so sincerely. He saw such anger in her eyes that he believed it wiser not to insist upon a conquest which he could not attain without offending his beloved, and which, owing to her resistance, became extremely doubtful. Finally, either through respect or timidity, he desisted, and not daring to look at Zeinis, he said sadly,

“‘No, cruel as you are, I will no longer run the

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risk of displeasing you. If I were more dear to you, doubtless you would be less afraid to make me happy. But though I dare no longer hope to gain your affection, I shall never love you less tenderly.' Having spoken these words, he rose from her side and departed.

"Mortally offended that Pheleas left her and nevertheless not daring to recall him, resting her head in her hands, Zeinis wept and remained on the divan. Disturbed, however, by her lov'r's departure, she rose to ascertain what had become of him, when prompted by his affection he re-entered the room. She blushed on seeing him and let herself fall on the divan, giving vent to a profound sigh. He rushed toward her and threw himself at her feet. He tenderly grasped her hand, but not daring to kiss it, bathed it in his tears.

"'Ah, get up,' Zeinis said without glancing at him.

"'No, Zeinis,' he cried, 'It is at your feet that I await my fate. One single word . . . but you are weeping! Ah, Zeinis, was it I who caused your tears to flow?'

"At this moment the heartless Zeinis pressed his hand and raising her eyes which were made more beautiful by the tears, sighed without answering him. The emotion which filled her eyes was no less apparent to Pheleas than it was to me.

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“Heavens!” he cried embracing her eagerly. ‘Is it possible that Zeinis pardons me?’

“Zeinis still kept silent. Pheleas did not lose anything she seemed to say and without questioning her any more, he sought from her lips the consent which she still seemed to refuse him. At this moment I heard the sound of a few stifled sighs. Pheleas had taken possession of that charming mouth where a moment ago my soul had lingered. But why do I recall a memory so unbearable? Zeinis had precipitated herself to her lover’s arms. Her love, her modesty, which only made her more beautiful, animated her face and her eyes. This first encounter lasted for a long time. Pheleas and Zeinis, both motionless, mingling their souls, seemed overcome by their passion.”

“All this,” said the Sultan, “could not have caused you much happiness. Is not that true? Then why in the name of heaven, did you fall in love when you did not have a body. That was an inconceivable folly. Really, where could such phantasy have led you? One must exercise reason occasionally.”

“Sire,” responded Amanzai, “it was not until I became engulfed by my passion that I felt how much it would torment me. As it usually happens, realization came too late.”

“I am really angry at your mishap, for I would have been delighted to see your lips upon the lips

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of the maiden you named," resumed the Sultan. "It is quite uunfortunate that you were disturbed."

"As long as Zeinis resisted her lover's advances," Amanzai continued, "I flattered myself into the belief that she was unconquerable. When I saw her more susceptible I deducted that because of a modesty inherent in youth, she would not be quite so feeble as to cause my happiness. I will avow nevertheless, that when I heard her relating the dream, which I believed to belong entirely to me, I also thought that Pheleas was the only one who ever appeared to her in her reveries and it was due to the power he wielded over her senses rather than to my own ecstasy, that she owed her pleasures. Little hope remained to me for escaping the fate I feared so much. Less considerate though I might have been, I congratulated Pheleas upon his good fortune, for at least I felt that I might be able to participate in it.

"Some things which he had related to Zeinis about his passion for her and the fidelity which he guarded so scrupulously, made me think how improbable it was for a youth to attain the age of fifteen or sixteen without having gratified some curiosity, the experience of which might have hindered the deliverance of my soul from a captivity which seemed for a long time so cruel to me and which at that moment I preferred to the most elevated past my soul might have occupied.

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"In despair over Zeinis's resistance, I awaited developments with less severe pangs, since I felt assured that whatever might happen I would not be obliged to leave her. However frightful for me the sweet lethargy into which they plunged and which each sigh they breathed seemed to increase, it retarded her lover's bold quest, though I felt how keenly they enjoyed their good fortune and I ardently prayed to Brahma to prolong it forever. Useless hopes! I was too undeserving to enjoy the sacrifice of these two innocent and worthy souls.

"Pheleas after languishing for some time upon Zeinis's bosom haunted by new desires which the resistance of his mistress made more ardent than ever, gazed upon her with eyes that bespoke the delicious intoxication of his heart. Zeinis, embarrassed by his glances, turned her head away, sighing.

"'What, you are avoiding my gaze?' he asked. 'Ah, rather turn toward me your charming eyes and see all the flame you have kindled.' Then he clasped her in his arms. Zeinis still attempted to evade his ecstasy. She did not desire either to resist him any longer or to create for herself the illusion of resistance. Pheleas was soon rewarded with glances as tender as he wished them to be. Although those last kindnesses which Zeinis showered upon her lover plunged her into a sweet languor hardly different from the one which my own transports had inducted

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in her; and although she looked at Pheleas with all the sensuality which he desired from her, yet she seemed to repent for having yielded so much to her feelings and endeavored to free herself from the arms of Pheleas.

“‘Ah, Zeinis,’ he persisted, ‘In the dream you related to me you did not fear to make me happy.’

“‘Pheleas,’ she replied, ‘great though my love may be for you, without the dream, without the riotous emotion it started in my senses, you would not have received so many favours.’

“‘Imagine, Sire, what chagrin I suffered, when I learned that it was to me alone, that my rival owed his good fortune.

“‘You ought to be well content with your victory,’ she continued, ‘and you cannot without offending me wish to become more ardent. I have done more than I should have done to prove to you my tenderness, but . . .’

“‘Ah, Zeinis,’ interrupted the impetuous Pheleas, ‘were it true that you loved me, you would hesitate less to tell it to me, or at least you would tell me more. Not only would you give yourself to my love with less timidly, but you would abandon yourself entirely to all my passion believing that was not yet sufficient for me. Come,’ he went on, throwing himself beside her with an eagerness which would have

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made me die, if a soul were mortal, 'come, consummate my happiness.'

"'Ah, Pheleas,' the timid Zeinis cried in a trembling voice, 'do you realize that you are torturing me? Alas, and you have vowed me so much respect! Pheleas, is it in this fashion that one shows respect to a beloved?'

"Zeinis's tears, her pleas, her commands and her threats did not stop Pheleas. Although the tunic of gauze which was between her and him had already permitted him to enjoy too many charms and although his transports had disarranged it, as it was during her slumber, yet less satisfied with the desire to see those which were still hidden, he finally removed the veil. Zeinis's modesty struggled feebly. Throwing himself on the charms which his rashness had disclosed to his gaze, he overwhelmed her with caresses so violent and so passionate, that he was left with only enough force to sigh.

"Her modesty and love still fought in the heart and in the eyes of Zeinis. The one refused all to her lover, the other did not leave any more to be desired. She did not dare to raise her eyes to Pheleas and she reciprocated with such an extreme tenderness all the transports which she inspired him. She forbade one thing, only to permit a more important one; she desired and then did not desire; she hid one beauty

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while displaying another; she repelled him with horror and then drew him closer toward her with rapture. At times her prejudice triumphed over her love and then was sacrificed to it, but with such reserve and such precaution that though seeming to be conquered still triumphed over it. Zeinis was alternately overcome by her susceptibility and her repugnance. The fear of displeasing Pheleas, the emotions aroused by his transports, and the exhaustion which a struggle of such duration brought about, finally forced her to succumb to him. Herself abandoned to all the desires which she inspired, able to endure only impatiently the pleasures which irritated without satisfying her, she sought the voluptuousness which they promised, but had not yet given her.

“At this moment overstrained by the vision which I saw and beginning to fear on account of certain actions of Pheleas which convinced me of his chastity that my soul would be expelled from a place where, in spite of the torments it experienced it desired to remain, I wished to leave the divan of Zeinis for a few moments and thus to avoid the decree of Brahma. But in vain; the same power that exiled me, opposed my efforts, and forced me to await, in my despair, the decision of my destiny.

“Pheleas . . . Oh, horrible memory, cruel moments of which the image will never be effaced from my

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soul; Pheleas intoxicated by the love and through the tender kindness of Zeinis master of all the charms which I adored, prepared to consummate his happiness. Zeinis yielded herself voluptuously to Pheleas's passion and if the new obstacles which still opposed their felicity retarded it, it did not diminish them. The lovely eyes of Zeinis filled with tears, her mouth wished to form a complaint, and at that moment tenderness itself did not permit her to heave a sigh. Pheleas, author of so many ills, was not hated for them. Zeinis, of whom Pheleas complained, was only loved more tenderly. Finally a cry more piercing than any before, a joy more vivid than I had yet seen burn in the eyes of Pheleas announced my misfortune and my deliverance. My soul full of love and grief, went murmuring to receive the orders and the new shackles from Brahma."

"What? is that all?" demanded the Sultan. "Either you were a divan for a very short time, or you saw too few incidents while you were one."

"It would have been tiresome for Your Majesty if I had related all that I had witnessed during my sojourn in divans," responded Amanzai. "I rather preferred to relate to you those incidents that were likely to amuse you."

"If the incidents which you depicted," said the Sultana, "were more entertaining than those which you have suppressed, and I believe it (since it is im-

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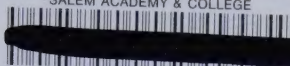
possible to compare them) I would still have reason to reproach you for employing only a few characters, while you had them all at your disposal, and for having voluntarily limited a subject, the nature of which is boundless."

"Doubtless I would have been wrong, Madam, if all the characters were equally agreeable and remarkable; if I could have discussed them all, without falling into the danger of exposing to your eyes traits common and vulgar; and if I could have prolonged a subject which, in spite of the great variety that I could have introduced into the characters must have become tiresome through continual repetition and the sameness of the plot."

"In truth," said the Sultan, "I believe that could one weigh all that he said, he might well be right, but I prefer that he be wrong, rather than to trouble myself about it all. Ah, Grandmother," he concluded sighing, "it is not in this manner that you related your stories."

F I N I S

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